A PLAIN-ENGLISH FACT CHECK

DALLAS, 1963

What the Records Show About the Kennedy Assassination



WARREN COMMISSION · HSCA · FILES · CLAIMS

The Investigations, the Evidence and the Theories, Checked Against the Record

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Dallas, 1963

What the Records Show About the Kennedy Assassination

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Dallas, 1963: What the Records Show About the Kennedy Assassination

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Information cutoff: This book reflects public records, reports and reporting available as of November 12, 2026. Records about the assassination are still being digitized and posted by the National Archives. Anything released or published after that date is not covered here.

About the historical records in this book: This book draws mainly on official government records, including the 1964 report of the Warren Commission, the 1979 report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, the 1976 report of the Senate's Church Committee, the 1998 final report of the Assassination Records Review Board, and pages published by the National Archives and Records Administration. Those records are public documents. Quotations from them are reproduced for comment and education. Where the records disagree with each other, this book says so and shows both sides. Every factual statement is footnoted to a source with a link, and the date the link was checked.

This book is for general information and education. It is not legal advice, and it does not accuse any living person of a crime. The verdicts in this book are judgments about how well a claim is supported by the public record as of the cutoff date. New records could change them.

No photographs, film frames or autopsy images are reproduced in this book. The one map is a simplified drawing made for this book.

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Fact check notice. The ratings and conclusions in this book are my own reading of the public record as of the date the book was finished, based on the sources it lists. Statements about named people, groups, and organizations are reported from those sources and are not new accusations. If a source is later corrected or new evidence comes out, a rating may change. If you believe something here is wrong, write to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com and I will review it.

About This Book

This book is part of a series of free, nonpartisan fact-check books. Each one takes a subject that people argue about, goes back to the original records, and sorts what is proven from what is claimed.

The Kennedy assassination is a good test for that approach. More than sixty years after Dallas, most Americans still tell pollsters they think more than one person was involved. At the same time, the federal government has now released almost all of its assassination records. I wanted to see what those records actually say, in plain language, and where they still leave gaps.

I do not ask you to trust me. I ask you to check me. Every fact has a footnote, every footnote has a link, and every claim in Part Seven gets a verdict with the evidence laid out next to it. If you find a mistake, I want to hear about it.

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Introduction: How to Read the Records and the Verdicts

Information in this introduction is current as of November 12, 2026.

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed while riding in an open car through Dallas, Texas.[1] Within two days, the man arrested for the crime, Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself shot dead in the basement of Dallas police headquarters.[2] He never stood trial.

That second shooting is one reason the case never felt finished. There was no courtroom, no cross-examination and no verdict from a jury. Instead, there have been government investigations, decades of books and films, and a long, slow release of secret files.

Here is a question to keep in mind as you read: what would it take to change your own mind about this case? Hold onto your answer. We will come back to it in the last chapter.

Why I wrote this book

Most Americans do not believe the official answer. In October 2023, Gallup found that 65 percent of U.S. adults thought others were involved in a conspiracy, and 29 percent thought one man was responsible.[3] That gap has lasted for six decades.

At the same time, the records are more open than ever. The National Archives says its President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection holds more than six million pages of records, photographs, films, sound recordings and artifacts.[4] Between March 2025 and January 2026, the Archives posted tens of thousands of pages that had been withheld in whole or in part.[5]

So the question for this book is simple. Now that the records are nearly all public, what do they actually show?

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[1] President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Warren Commission), *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 1-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[2] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[3] Megan Brenan, "Decades Later, Most Americans Doubt Lone Gunman Killed JFK," Gallup, November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/514310/decades-later-americans-doubt-lone-gunman-killed-jfk.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026.

[4] National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "JFK Assassination Records" (collection home page; page last reviewed March 19, 2025), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk, accessed November 12, 2026.

[5] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

The four big investigations

Four official bodies did most of the work you will read about. I will use their short names throughout.

Short name	Full name	Active	Main product
Warren Commission	President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy	1963-1964	Report delivered to President Johnson on September 24, 1964
Church Committee	Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities	Mid-1970s	Book V of its final report, April 23, 1976
HSCA	House Select Committee on Assassinations	1976-1979	Report published in 1979
ARRB	Assassination Records Review Board	1994-1998	Final report, September 1998

Table sources: the Warren Commission's transmittal letter and report;[6] the Church Committee's Book V;[7] the HSCA report;[8] and the ARRB final report.[9] Table current as of November 12, 2026.

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[6] Warren Commission, title page, members and letter of transmittal to President Johnson, September 24, 1964, in *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/letter.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. ix, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[7] U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), *Final Report, Book V: The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies*, S. Rept. 94-755, April 23, 1976, title page and letter of transmittal, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[8] U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations*, H. Rept. 95-1828 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979), pp. 9-10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[9] Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (Washington, DC: September 1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

These four did not all agree. The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald acted alone.[10] Fifteen years later, the HSCA agreed that Oswald fired the shots that killed the President, but concluded that Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy," largely because of acoustic evidence that was later disputed.[11] When two official sources disagree like that, I show you both, explain why they differ, and tell you which way the later evidence points.

How I handle sources

I sort every source into one of five tiers. The higher tiers carry more weight.

Tier	What it includes	Examples in this book
1	Primary and official records	Warren Commission report, HSCA report, Church Committee report, ARRB report, the Records Act, National Archives pages
2	Nonpartisan analysis and polling	National Academy of Sciences acoustics review, Gallup polls
3	Scholarly and scientific work	Peer-reviewed journal articles on the acoustic evidence
4	Journalism and fact-checks	Associated Press, CBS News and PBS reporting on the 2025 releases
5	Advocacy	Authors and groups who argue for a position, labeled as such

What does Tier 5 mean in a book like this? These are authors and groups who have taken a side. I do not leave them out, because many readers first meet the case through them. But I label them each time, and I try to balance one side with the other. Two well-known books argue that Oswald acted alone: Gerald Posner's *Case Closed*, published by Random House

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[10] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[11] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

in 1993, and Vincent Bugliosi's *Reclaiming History*, published by W. W. Norton in 2007.[12] On the other side of the long fight over the records is the Mary Ferrell Foundation, a nonprofit research group that keeps a large online archive and whose work centers on getting the records into public view.[13] I did not rely on any Tier 5 source for a fact the records themselves could supply.

A lower-tier source can still be right. But when a Tier 4 news story and a Tier 1 record disagree, I go with the record and say so.

Three more rules:

- I quote a person only when I can link to where they said it.
- I do not use anonymous claims. If a story rests on unnamed sources, it stays out.
- When I could not confirm something, I mark it **[Not verified]** and say what I searched.

Confirmed facts, interpretations and unknowns

Every chapter ends with a short box that sorts its content three ways.

- **Confirmed fact** means the record shows it directly, and the sources agree.
- **Interpretation** means someone drew a conclusion from the facts. I always say whose conclusion it is.
- **Unknown** means the record does not answer the question, or the sources conflict and nothing settles it.

This matters because much of the argument about Dallas is really an argument about interpretations. Two people can look at the same fact and draw opposite conclusions. I want you to see where the facts stop and the reasoning starts.

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[12] Gerald Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (New York: Random House, 1993), ISBN 978-0-679-41825-2 (catalog record, Open Library), https://openlibrary.org/works/OL2005705W/Case_closed, link not opened during research (book not read for this edition; publication details from the Open Library and Publishers Weekly listings); Deseret News, "New Book Claims to Prove Oswald Was Lone Gunman," August 22, 1993, https://www.deseret.com/1993/8/22/19062279/new-book-claims-to-prove-oswald-was-lone-gunman/, accessed November 12, 2026; Vincent Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reclaiming_History, link not opened during research (book not read for this edition; publication details from a secondary description); Wikipedia, "Reclaiming History" (online encyclopedia article; used for publication details and a description of the book), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reclaiming_History, accessed November 12, 2026.

[13] Mary Ferrell Foundation, "About MFF", https://maryferrell.org/pages/About_MFF.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Rex Bradford, "State of the JFK Releases 2026," Mary Ferrell Foundation, April 2026, https://maryferrell.org/pages/State_of_JFK_Releases_2026.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The four verdicts

Part Seven tests seventeen popular claims. Each claim gets one of four verdicts.

Verdict	What it means
True	The best available evidence supports the claim, and no strong evidence cuts against it.
Partly true	Part of the claim holds up and part does not, or the claim is true but misleading as usually stated.
False (debunked)	The best available evidence contradicts the claim, or the claim has been investigated and no credible evidence supports it while the evidence points elsewhere.
Inconclusive	The evidence is not strong enough either way, or credible official sources disagree and nothing has settled it.

A verdict is not a final word on history. It is my judgment about the public record as of the cutoff date, with the sources laid out so you can judge for yourself.

A word about times and numbers

The Warren Commission report gives most times as Dallas times, but it labels several of them "e.s.t.," Eastern Standard Time, even though Dallas was on Central time. For example, it gives the shooting as "12:30 p.m., e.s.t." and the swearing-in of President Johnson as "2:38 p.m., e.s.t.," while its own summary gives the arrival at Love Field as "11:40 a.m., c.s.t."[14] In this book I give the clock times as printed and treat them as Dallas local time, because that is how the report's own timeline fits together.

Page counts for the recent record releases also differ from source to source. When they do, I give the National Archives figure and note the others.

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[14] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 1, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

What this book does not do

This book does not show photographs, film frames or autopsy images. I describe the events factually, without graphic detail. I do not name living private citizens whose personal information was exposed in the 2025 releases, and I do not repeat that information.

This book also does not try to solve the case. It tries to show you, as clearly as I can, what is known, what is argued, and what is still open.

How the book is organized

- **Part One** walks through the day itself and the first forty-eight hours.
- **Part Two** looks at Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby.
- **Part Three** explains how the Warren Commission worked and what it found.
- **Part Four** goes through the physical evidence: the rifle, the shots, the single bullet finding, the Zapruder film and the medical evidence.
- **Part Five** covers the later investigations, including the HSCA and its disputed acoustics finding.
- **Part Six** covers the records: what the agencies held back, and how the files were finally released.
- **Part Seven** tests seventeen claims.
- **Part Eight** looks at what Americans believe and why the doubt lasts.

The appendices include a timeline, a list of key people, a guide to searching the National Archives collection, a list of abbreviations and a bibliography sorted by tier.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** President Kennedy was killed in Dallas on November 22, 1963, and Lee Harvey Oswald was shot and killed two days later.[15]
- **Interpretation:** Whether Oswald acted alone is an interpretation of the evidence. The Warren Commission said yes. The HSCA said probably not. Both are official bodies, and their reasons are covered in later chapters.[16]

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[15] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 1-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[16] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-

- **Unknown:** What the most recent record release, posted January 30, 2026, adds. The National Archives lists it at 11,022 pages, but I found no published description of its contents.[17]

1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[17] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part One: The Day

Part One walks through November 22, 1963, from the planning of the trip to the first forty-eight hours after the shots. Most of what follows comes from the Warren Commission's own narrative, which was built from witness testimony, police radio logs, films and physical evidence. Where later investigators corrected that narrative, I say so.

Chapter 1: Why Kennedy Went to Texas

When people think about Dallas, they usually start at 12:30 p.m. on Elm Street. But the trip began more than a year earlier, and the reasons for it explain a lot about how the day unfolded: why there was a motorcade, why the car was open, and why the route went past the Texas School Book Depository.

A political trip

According to the Warren Commission, a formal visit to Texas had been "under consideration for almost a year before it occurred."[18] The Commission listed several reasons. As a party leader, the President wanted to settle a "factional controversy within the Democratic Party in Texas before the election of 1964." The party also saw a chance to raise money at a political dinner in Austin.[19]

The basic decision was made at a meeting of President Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and Texas Governor John B. Connally on June 5, 1963, at the Cortez Hotel in El Paso.[20] The first plan was a single day of "whirlwind visits" to Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston. In September, the White House stretched the trip to run from the afternoon of November 21 through the evening of Friday, November 22.[21]

Dallas was not friendly ground for the President. A Dallas newspaper editorial in September asked residents to be "congenial hosts" even though "Dallas didn't vote for Mr. Kennedy in 1960, may not endorse him in '64."[22]

Why a motorcade?

Governor Connally first opposed a motorcade because a one-day trip left no time for it. He withdrew his objection once the San Antonio stop moved to Thursday afternoon. In his

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[18] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 28, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[19] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 28, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[20] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 28, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[21] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 29, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[22] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 40, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

words, "then we had the time, and I withdrew my objections to a motorcade."[23] Kenneth O'Donnell, a special assistant to the President who coordinated the trip, told the Commission, "we had a motorcade wherever we went."[24]

That point matters. The motorcade was not unusual for this President. It was the standard way he let large crowds see him.

Choosing the lunch site and the route

The Dallas stop centered on a lunch hosted by business and civic leaders. The White House told the Secret Service that the President would arrive and leave through Love Field, that a motorcade should run through downtown to the lunch, and that after lunch he would return to the airport "by the most direct route."[25]

The Secret Service looked at three sites. Market Hall was not available. The Women's Building at the State Fair Grounds was easy to secure but lacked food-handling facilities. The Trade Mart had everything needed for the event, but it also had many entrances, balconies and catwalks that made it harder to protect. Kenneth O'Donnell made the final decision for the Trade Mart, and the Secret Service learned of it on November 14.[26]

Once the Trade Mart was chosen, the route followed. The motorcade would go through downtown on Main Street, then turn right onto Houston Street and left onto Elm Street, because Elm led to the ramp for the Stemmons Freeway and the Trade Mart.[27]

Why not stay on Main Street, which ran straight through the plaza? The Commission explained that a concrete barrier between Main and Elm made it "impracticable for vehicles to turn right from Main directly to the access road" to the freeway, and a sign on the barrier

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[23] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 29, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[24] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 29, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[25] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 30, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[26] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 31, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[27] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 39-40, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

told Main Street traffic not to turn.[28] Traffic heading west on Main was directed to turn right at Houston to reach the freeway.[29]

That one traffic detail put the President's car on a slow, curving downhill stretch of Elm Street, right below the windows of the Texas School Book Depository.

The route was public

The route was not a secret. On November 19, the *Dallas Times-Herald* printed the precise route, including "west on Main, turning back to Elm at Houston and then out Stemmons Freeway to the Trade Mart." The *Dallas Morning News* printed a similar description the same day.[30]

This is important for later chapters. Anyone in Dallas who read a newspaper that week could have known the car would pass the Depository. The Warren Commission did not treat the published route as evidence of a plot, but people who argue for a conspiracy sometimes leave out the fact that it was in the paper.

Here is a question for you: if the route had been kept secret, would that have made the case for a lone gunman stronger or weaker? There is no right answer, but it is worth thinking about.

Dallas in the weeks before

The city had a recent history that worried officials. On October 24, 1963, Adlai E. Stevenson, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, "was jeered, jostled, and spat upon by hostile demonstrators" after a speech in Dallas.[31] Mayor Earle Cabell called on the city to redeem itself during the President's visit. On October 26, the press reported that Dallas Police Chief Jesse E. Curry planned to call in 100 extra off-duty officers.[32]

Hostile material also appeared just before the visit. On November 21, an anonymous handbill was passed around Dallas with two photographs of the President and the caption

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[28] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[29] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[30] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 40, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[31] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[32] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

"Wanted for Treason."[33] On the morning of November 22, the *Dallas Morning News* carried a full-page, black-bordered advertisement headed "Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas," which was a list of statements and questions critical of the President. Its sponsor, calling itself the American Fact-finding Committee, later testified that the name was "formed strictly for the purpose of having a name to put in the paper."[34]

The Commission did not find that either the handbill or the advertisement was connected to the shooting. I mention them because they show the mood that officials were worried about.

What the Secret Service did, and did not, check

The Secret Service's Protective Research Section kept files on people who had made threats against the President. When agents checked those files for the Dallas area, they found no listing for anyone considered a potential danger in the territory of the regional office that covered Dallas and Fort Worth.[35]

Agents also planned police coverage along the route. Police were assigned to each overpass and told to keep them clear. But, as the Commission put it, "No arrangements were made for police or building custodians to inspect buildings along the motorcade route."[36] Lee Harvey Oswald's name was not in the Secret Service files. Why that was so, and whether it should have been, is one of the questions the Commission took up in its review of presidential protection. I cover it in Chapter 15.[37]

The open car

The President's limousine was a specially designed 1961 Lincoln convertible. It came with a clear plastic bubbletop, but the Commission noted that the top "was neither bulletproof nor bullet resistant."[38] Because the skies had cleared in Dallas, the Secret Service advance agent

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[33] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[34] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 41-42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[35] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 29-30, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[36] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[37] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 31, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[38] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

directed that the top not be used. He was following instructions passed along from Kenneth O'Donnell: "If the weather is clear and it is not raining, have that bubbletop off."[39]

So the open car was a weather decision, made under a standing instruction. Even with the top on, the Commission's description makes clear it would not have stopped a bullet.

Thursday and Friday morning

The trip began on Thursday, November 21. The Kennedys flew to San Antonio, where the President dedicated the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base. They went on to Houston for a motorcade, a stadium appearance at Rice University and a dinner, then flew to Fort Worth for the night.[40]

On Friday morning, the President spoke at a breakfast in Fort Worth and to a crowd in a parking lot. Before leaving the hotel, he talked with Mrs. Kennedy and O'Donnell about the risks of public appearances. O'Donnell later told the Commission that the President said "if anybody really wanted to shoot the President of the United States, it was not a very difficult job--all one had to do was get a high building someday with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt."[41]

That quote has been repeated for decades. It is real, it is in the official record, and it comes from one witness's recollection of a private conversation.

Arrival in Dallas

The President's plane, Air Force One, touched down at Love Field in Dallas at 11:40 a.m. The Vice President's plane had landed about five minutes earlier. After greeting a crowd along a fence, the President and Mrs. Kennedy went to the car about ten minutes after arriving.[42] The motorcade left Love Field "shortly after 11:50 a.m."[43]

Chapter 2 picks up from there.

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[39] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 43-45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[40] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[41] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[42] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 42-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[43] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 46, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The trip was planned at a June 5, 1963, meeting in El Paso; the Trade Mart was chosen as the lunch site; the route down Elm Street was printed in both Dallas papers on November 19; and the bubbletop was not used because the weather had cleared.[44]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission treated the route choice as an ordinary traffic decision tied to the freeway ramp. Some critics have read the route and the open car as signs of planning by insiders. The Commission's record shows a documented chain of ordinary decisions, and I found no official finding to the contrary.[45]
- **Unknown:** Whether different choices, such as a closed car or a building check along the route, would have prevented the shooting. No investigation can answer a question about what might have happened.

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[44] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 28, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 31, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 40, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[45] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 31, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 2: Dallas, Minute by Minute

This chapter lays out what happened between the motorcade's departure from Love Field and the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald a little more than two hours later. I rely mainly on the Warren Commission's narrative, which used the Dallas police radio logs, witness testimony and the film taken by Abraham Zapruder. I describe what happened plainly and leave out graphic detail.

The drive through downtown

The motorcade left Love Field shortly after 11:50 a.m. It moved at up to 25 to 30 miles an hour on the outskirts of the city, and the President stopped the car twice, once to answer a sign asking him to shake hands and once to speak to a nun and a group of children.[46] Downtown, the crowds were so thick that Secret Service Special Agent Clinton J. Hill left the follow-up car four times to ride on the back of the President's limousine.[47]

The President sat on the right side of the rear seat with Mrs. Kennedy on his left. Governor Connally sat on the right jump seat in front of him and Mrs. Connally on the left jump seat. Special Agent William R. Greer drove, with Special Agent Roy H. Kellerman beside him.[48]

The motorcade went west on Main Street, turned right onto Houston Street at the edge of Dealey Plaza, then turned left onto Elm Street.[49] As the car approached Elm, Mrs. Connally turned to the President and said, "Mr. President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you." The President replied, "That is very obvious."[50]

Dealey Plaza

Dealey Plaza is a landscaped triangle of about three acres at the west edge of downtown Dallas. Houston Street forms the base of the triangle. Three streets, Commerce, Main and Elm, cross the plaza and meet at the far point, where they pass under a railroad bridge

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[46] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 46, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[47] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[48] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[49] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[50] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

called the Triple Underpass, almost 500 feet from Houston Street.[51] Elm Street is the northernmost of the three. After the turn from Houston, it curves to the southwest and runs downhill toward the underpass.[52]

The Texas School Book Depository stood at the northwest corner of Houston and Elm. A grassy slope north of Elm, between the Depository and the railroad bridge, later became known as the grassy knoll.

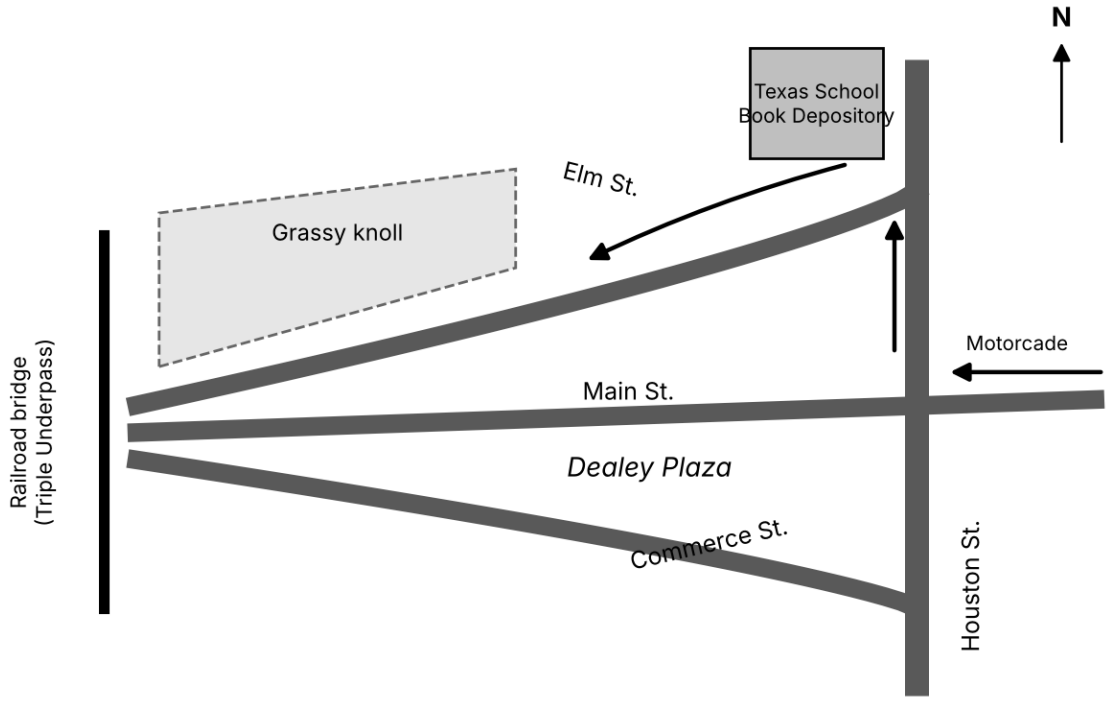


Figure 1. Simplified sketch of Dealey Plaza in November 1963, drawn for this book and not to scale. Street layout follows the Warren Commission's description. The arrow shows the direction of the motorcade.

The shots

Here is how the Warren Commission summed up the moment:

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[51] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[52] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 39, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

> "At 12:30 p.m., e.s.t., as the President's open limousine proceeded at approximately 11 miles per hour along Elm Street toward the Triple Underpass, shots fired from a rifle mortally wounded President Kennedy and seriously injured Governor Connally."[53]

As I explained in the Introduction, the time is Dallas local time even though the report labels it "e.s.t."

How did the Commission fix the time? Four witnesses supported it. A Secret Service agent in the Vice President's car saw the Depository's large sign clock read 12:30 as the car turned onto Houston Street. David Powers, in the follow-up car, remarked that it was 12:30, the time they were due at the Trade Mart. Kellerman looked at his watch seconds after the shooting and said "12:30." And the Dallas police radio log shows Chief Curry reporting the shooting at 12:30.[54]

The car's speed came from the Zapruder film. Using the camera's speed of 18.3 frames per second, the Commission computed that the car averaged 11.2 miles per hour just before the shot that struck the President's head.[55]

The Commission found that one bullet passed through the President's neck and a later bullet struck his head and was fatal. Governor Connally was wounded in the back, the right side of the chest, the right wrist and the left thigh.[56]

Inside the car

The people in the car remembered the moment differently, which is common in sudden events.

- Governor Connally recognized the first noise as a rifle shot, turned to his right, and then felt something strike his back. He told the Commission he was sure he was hit by the second shot, which he said he did not hear.[57]

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[53] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[54] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 48-49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[55] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[56] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[57] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- Mrs. Connally saw the President with his hands at his neck before she pulled her husband down into her lap.[58]
- Kellerman heard the President say "My God, I am hit," told the driver "Let's get out of here; we are hit," and radioed the lead car, "We are hit. Get us to the hospital immediately."[59]
- Greer first thought the noise was a motorcycle backfire. He sped up as Kellerman told him to get out fast.[60]

Special Agent Hill jumped from the follow-up car and ran to the limousine. He reached it about the time of the fatal shot, climbed onto the back as the car sped up, and pushed Mrs. Kennedy, who had climbed onto the rear of the car, back into the seat. David Powers told the Commission she would probably have fallen off and been killed if Hill had not reached her.[61]

The disagreement over Governor Connally's timing became one of the biggest questions in the case. I cover it in Chapter 10.

Outside the car

Several witnesses in front of the Depository said they saw a rifle being fired from the southeast corner window on the sixth floor. One of them, Howard L. Brennan, was sitting across Elm Street facing the building. He told a policeman he had seen a slender man, about 5 feet 10 inches tall and in his early thirties, take aim from that window and fire. He had noticed the man in the window a few minutes before the motorcade arrived.[62]

Not every witness agreed on where the shots came from. The HSCA later counted 178 witnesses who gave an opinion or said they could not tell. Of those, 49 said the shots came from the Depository, 21 said the grassy knoll, 30 named some other place, and 78 could not

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[58] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[59] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[60] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[61] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 50-51, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[62] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 5, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

tell. Only 4 of the 178 pointed to more than one location.[63] I return to the witnesses in Chapter 14.

The first minutes after

A Dallas motorcycle officer, Marrion L. Baker, was riding several cars behind the President. He saw pigeons scatter from the Depository roof, raced to the building, and met the building superintendent, Roy Truly. They ran up the stairs. On the second floor, Baker saw a man through the glass in a lunchroom door and stopped him at gunpoint. Truly said the man worked in the building, and Baker moved on. The Commission said "not more than 2 minutes had elapsed since the shooting." The man was Lee Harvey Oswald.[64]

At 12:34 p.m., the police radio named the Depository as a possible source of the shots. At 12:45 p.m., it broadcast a description of the suspect based mainly on Brennan's account.[65] An inspector sealed the building between about 12:37 and 12:40 p.m.[66] By then, according to the Commission, Oswald had already left. A Depository employee saw him walk through the second-floor offices holding a full Coke bottle about a minute after the encounter with Baker.[67]

The race to Parkland

Parkland Memorial Hospital was about four miles from the Depository.[68] Doctors worked on the President in Trauma Room 1. Dr. Malcolm O. Perry performed a tracheotomy to open an airway, and other doctors gave blood and fluids.[69] At about 1 p.m., after last rites were given by Father Oscar L. Huber, Dr. William Kemp Clark pronounced the President dead.

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[63] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 87, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 90, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[64] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 5-6, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[65] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 5, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[66] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[67] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 6, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[68] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 52, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[69] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 53-54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The Commission said the President "could have survived the neck injury, but the head wound was fatal."[70]

Governor Connally survived his wounds.

Oswald's movements

The Warren Commission traced Oswald's path after he left the Depository:

- At about 12:40 p.m., he boarded a city bus seven blocks east of the Depository. The bus was heading back toward the Depository and was quickly caught in traffic. A former landlady, Mary Bledsoe, recognized him on board. He got off after three or four minutes.[71]
- A few minutes later he took a taxi to a point on North Beckley Avenue in the Oak Cliff section, a few blocks past his rooming house. When he was arrested, he had a bus transfer in his pocket marked for that bus route.[72]
- At about 1 p.m., he arrived at the rooming house at 1026 North Beckley Avenue. The housekeeper, Earlene Roberts, said he seemed to be in a hurry. He left a few minutes later, zipping up a jacket.[73]

The shooting of Officer Tippit

At about 1:15 p.m., Dallas police officer J. D. Tippit was driving slowly east on 10th Street in Oak Cliff. He had been told by radio at 12:45 to patrol the central Oak Cliff area. He pulled up next to a man walking the same way, a man who fit the general description of the suspect. When Tippit got out of his car, the man shot him four times, killing him.[74]

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[70] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 55, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[71] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 6, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[72] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 6, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[73] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 6, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[74] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 6-7, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

A witness, Domingo Benavides, used Tippit's radio to report the shooting. The message was received shortly after 1:16 p.m.[75] Several witnesses saw the gunman leave, emptying cartridge cases from a revolver as he went. Two women in the corner house later found cartridge cases near their home.[76] The Commission later reported that nine eyewitnesses identified Oswald as the gunman or as the man they saw fleeing.[77]

The Texas Theatre

A few blocks away, shoe store manager Johnny Calvin Brewer saw a man duck into his store's entrance as a police car passed. Brewer followed him and watched him slip into the Texas Theatre without paying. The cashier, Julia Postal, called the police shortly after 1:40 p.m.[78] At 1:45 p.m., the police radio broadcast: "Have information a suspect just went in the Texas Theatre on West Jefferson."[79]

Officers surrounded the theater and turned up the lights. When Patrolman M. N. McDonald ordered the man to his feet, he heard him say, "Well, it's all over now." The man drew a gun and struck the officer. After a struggle, police disarmed and handcuffed him and took him to headquarters, arriving at about 2 p.m.[80]

The rifle and the missing employee

Back at the Depository, Deputy Sheriff Luke Mooney found three empty cartridge cases near the southeast corner window of the sixth floor, next to boxes arranged as a screen and a rest. At 1:22 p.m., about ten minutes later, Deputy Sheriff Eugene Boone found a bolt-action rifle with a telescopic sight hidden between rows of boxes near the stairs in the northwest

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[75] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 7, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[76] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 7, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[77] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[78] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 7-8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[79] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[80] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

corner.[81] It was stamped with serial number "C2766," the year "1940," "MADE ITALY" and "CAL. 6.5," and was about 40 inches long.[82]

Meanwhile, Roy Truly noticed that one of the fifteen warehouse workers was missing: Lee Harvey Oswald. Homicide Captain J. Will Fritz went back to headquarters shortly after 2 p.m. and asked detectives to pick up the missing man. He learned that the man was already in the interrogation room. The suspect from the theater and the missing employee were the same person.[83]

A new President

At the hospital, Vice President Johnson decided to return to Washington on the President's plane. Mrs. Kennedy would not leave without her husband's body, and Johnson said he would not leave Dallas without her.[84] Two Dallas officials told the President's staff that the body could not leave the city until an autopsy was done there. Over their protests, the casket was taken to the airport shortly after 2 p.m.[85] At 2:38 p.m., with Mrs. Kennedy beside him, Lyndon Baines Johnson took the oath of office as the 36th President of the United States. Federal Judge Sarah T. Hughes gave the oath.[86]

The plane landed at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland at 5:58 p.m. Eastern time. Mrs. Kennedy chose the Naval hospital at Bethesda for the autopsy because her husband had served in the Navy.[87]

The decision to move the body out of Dallas before a Texas autopsy matters in later arguments about the medical evidence. I come back to it in Chapter 11.

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[81] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 8-9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[82] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[83] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[84] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 57, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[85] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[86] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[87] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Timeline: November 22, 1963

All times are Dallas local time unless noted. Sources: Warren Commission report, pages 1-9 and 42-58.

Time	Event	Source
11:40 a.m.	Air Force One lands at Love Field	Warren Report, p. 1
Shortly after 11:50 a.m.	Motorcade leaves Love Field	p. 46
12:30 p.m.	Shots fired in Dealey Plaza	p. 48
Within about 2 minutes	Officer Baker and Roy Truly meet Oswald in the second-floor lunchroom	p. 5
12:34 p.m.	Police radio names the Depository as a possible source of the shots	p. 5
12:37 to 12:40 p.m.	Inspector Sawyer orders that no one leave the Depository	p. 8
About 12:40 p.m.	Oswald boards a bus seven blocks east of the Depository	p. 6
12:45 p.m.	Police radio broadcasts the suspect's description	p. 5
About 1:00 p.m.	Oswald arrives at his rooming house	p. 6
About 1:00 p.m.	President Kennedy pronounced dead at Parkland Hospital	p. 55
About 1:15 p.m.	Officer J. D. Tippit shot in Oak Cliff	p. 6
Shortly after 1:16 p.m.	Tippit shooting reported over his car radio	p. 7
1:22 p.m.	Rifle found on the sixth floor	p. 9
Shortly after 1:40 p.m.	Theater cashier calls police	p. 8

Time	Event	Source
1:45 p.m.	Police radio alarm for the Texas Theatre	p. 8
About 2:00 p.m.	Oswald arrives at police headquarters	p. 8
Shortly after 2:00 p.m.	President's casket taken to Love Field	p. 58
2:38 p.m.	Lyndon B. Johnson sworn in aboard Air Force One	p. 58
5:58 p.m. Eastern	Air Force One lands at Andrews Air Force Base	p. 58

Table source: Warren Commission report, pages as listed. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[88]

Look at the timeline for a moment. About forty-five minutes passed between the shots in Dealey Plaza and the shooting of Officer Tippit, and about an hour and a half passed before Oswald was in custody. Would you expect a planned getaway to look like a bus ride back toward the scene, a taxi, a stop at home and a walk? People have read that same sequence in very different ways, which is the subject of later chapters.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The times, places and events in the table above are documented by police radio logs, witness testimony and physical evidence, as summarized by the Warren Commission.[89]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission concluded that the man in the sixth-floor window, the man who shot Officer Tippit and the man arrested in the theater were all

[88] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 1-9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 46-58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[89] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 1-9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Lee Harvey Oswald.[90] The HSCA agreed that Oswald fired the shots that killed the President.[91]

- **Unknown:** Exactly where Oswald was in the Depository between the encounter in the lunchroom and his exit, and how long it took. The Commission's timeline for those minutes rests on reconstructions and estimates, not a clock.

[90] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 19-20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[91] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 3: The First 48 Hours

The two days after the assassination shaped everything that came later. In that short window, the police built their case, the press reported it in real time, much of it wrong, and the only suspect was killed before he could be tried. This chapter covers Friday afternoon through Sunday, November 24, 1963.

Questioning without a record

Between 2:30 p.m. on Friday and 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, Oswald was questioned for a total of about 12 hours, according to the Warren Commission.[92] The questioning took place in Captain Fritz's office, a room about 14 feet by 9 and a half feet. As many as seven or eight people crowded into it at a time, and more than 25 different people took part in or watched the questioning at some point. They included Dallas detectives, FBI agents, Secret Service agents and a postal inspector.[93]

Here is a fact that surprises many readers. Captain Fritz "kept no notes and there were no stenographic or tape recordings" of the questioning.[94] What we know about what Oswald said comes from the later reports and memories of the people in the room.

According to those accounts:

- Oswald denied shooting the President or Officer Tippit.[95]
- He said he was eating lunch at the time of the shooting and then spoke with his foreman before going home.[96]
- He denied owning a rifle. When shown a photograph of himself holding a rifle and a pistol, he said his face had been put on someone else's body.[97]

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[92] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 199, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[93] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 199, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[94] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 180, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[95] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[96] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[97] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- He refused to answer questions about a Selective Service card in his wallet that bore his photograph and the name "Alek J. Hidell."[98]

I come back to the photograph in Chapter 8. The HSCA later had it studied by photo experts, who found no evidence of faking.[99]

His answers against the record

The Warren Commission compared what Oswald told the police with what other evidence showed. It said that "Frequently, however, he was confronted with evidence which he could not explain, and he resorted to statements which are known to be lies." The Commission did not treat those lies as proof of guilt, but it said they "had probative value in deciding the weight to be given to his denials."[100]

Here is a sample, as the Commission reported it:

What Oswald said	What the Commission found
He did not own a rifle, and had fired only a small .22 rifle since leaving the Marines	The rifle had been ordered under the name "Hidell" in his handwriting; Marina Oswald said she photographed him holding it
The backyard photographs were fakes	Marina Oswald said she took them; a photography expert testified they were not composites
He bought his revolver in Fort Worth	He bought it from a mail-order company in Los Angeles
He did not know anyone named A. J. Hidell	He was carrying a Selective Service card with his photo and the name "Alek J. Hidell"
The rooming house listed him as "O. H. Lee" because the landlady made a mistake	He had signed the register as O. H. Lee himself
He never told Frazier he was going to Irving for curtain rods	Frazier testified he did; no curtain rods were found
He ate lunch with "Junior" at the time of the	The only "Junior" in the building, James

[98] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[99] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 54-55, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[100] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 180, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

What Oswald said	What the Commission found
shooting	Jarman Jr., said he did not eat with or see Oswald
After lunch he talked with his foreman, Bill Shelley, and then left	Shelley denied seeing Oswald after noon

Table source: Warren Commission report, pages 130 and 180-182. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[101]

Remember the limits of this table. These are the police officers' accounts of what Oswald said, written afterward, because no recording was made. Oswald never had a chance to answer the Commission's findings in court.

One more piece of evidence from that Friday night is worth knowing about, because critics sometimes cite it. The Dallas police gave Oswald a paraffin test, meant to show whether a person had recently fired a gun. The results were positive for his hands and negative for his right cheek. The Commission heard expert testimony that the test was unreliable and "placed no reliance on the paraffin tests" either way.[102]

The rifle is traced

The FBI moved quickly on the rifle. By 10 p.m. on Friday, it had traced the rifle to a mail-order company in Chicago. About six hours later, the company reported that the rifle had been ordered in March 1963 by "A. Hidell" for shipment to post office box 2915 in Dallas, a box rented by Oswald. By 6:45 p.m. on Saturday, the FBI told the Dallas police that handwriting on the order documents was Oswald's.[103]

At about 3 p.m. on Friday, police went to the home of Ruth Paine in Irving, Texas, where Oswald's wife Marina was staying. Marina Oswald told them her husband owned a rifle and led them to a blanket in the garage where it had been kept. When an officer lifted the blanket, it was empty.[104]

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[101] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 130, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 180-182, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[102] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 180, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[103] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[104] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 15, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The charges

At 7:10 p.m. on Friday, November 22, Oswald was formally told he had been charged with the murder of Officer J. D. Tippit. The formal charge for the assassination of President Kennedy was filed shortly after 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 23.[105]

Oswald made several phone calls on Saturday trying to get a lawyer of his own choosing. He turned down an offer of help from the president of the local bar association, saying he would first try on his own. By Sunday morning he still had no lawyer.[106]

A circus in the hallway

Police headquarters was mobbed. More than 100 reporters, photographers and television crews packed the third-floor hallway that Oswald had to walk through between his cell and the interview room. Between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, he appeared in that hallway at least 16 times.[107]

Shortly after midnight on Friday, at the urging of reporters, Police Chief Jesse E. Curry brought Oswald into the police assembly room for a press conference. The room was crowded with newsmen shouting questions. Among them was a 52-year-old Dallas nightclub operator named Jack Ruby.[108]

Police officials talked openly about the evidence. The Commission said "Some of the information divulged was erroneous."[109] District Attorney Henry M. Wade, for example, said in public that a paraffin test showed Oswald had fired a gun. The Commission noted that the test "merely showed that he had nitrate traces on his hands, which did not necessarily mean

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[105] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[106] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[107] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[108] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[109] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

that he had fired either a rifle or a pistol."[110] Captain Fritz said the case was "cinched," and Chief Curry said "we are sure of our case."[111]

The Commission was blunt about the result. It agreed with the American Bar Association that Oswald's chance at "a trial by 12 jurors free of preconception as to his guilt or innocence would have been seriously jeopardized by the premature disclosure and weighing of the evidence against him."[112] It wrote that "The courtroom, not the newspaper or television screen, is the appropriate forum in our system for the trial of a man accused of a crime."[113]

Chief Curry told the Commission that he had not ordered the press out of the building, adding, "which if I had it to do over I would."[114]

Think about this for a moment. Many of the early reports that people remember from that weekend came from officials speaking off the cuff in a crowded hallway. Some were wrong. Could some of the confusion that followed have started right there?

Sunday morning

On Sunday, November 24, Oswald was to be moved from the city jail to the Dallas County jail, about a mile away. Reporters had been told the night before that the transfer would not happen before 10 a.m. Between 2:30 and 3 a.m. that morning, anonymous callers threatened Oswald's life in calls to the FBI's Dallas office and the sheriff's office.[115] Even so, reporters and camera crews crowded into the police basement to watch the transfer.[116]

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[110] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 238-239, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[111] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 239, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[112] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 239, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[113] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 240, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[114] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 241, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[115] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[116] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chief Curry's subordinates had the impression that a surprise transfer was out of the question because Curry had promised the press they could witness it.[117]

At about 11:20 a.m., Oswald came out of the basement jail office between detectives. He had taken a few steps toward a waiting car when a man stepped out of the crowd of reporters on the right of the cameras, moved within a few feet of him, and fired one shot from a Colt .38 revolver into his abdomen. Millions of people saw it on live television.[118]

Oswald reached Parkland Hospital within seven minutes. He was pronounced dead at 1:07 p.m. without regaining consciousness.[119]

The man who shot him was Jack Ruby. Ruby was arrested on the spot. He denied that he was part of any conspiracy and said he had acted in "a temporary fit of depression and rage" over the President's death.[120] Chapter 6 covers Ruby in detail, including how he got into the basement and what later investigators concluded.

What was lost

Because Oswald died, the evidence against him was never tested in court. No defense lawyer cross-examined the witnesses. No jury weighed the rifle evidence, the eyewitness identifications or the photographs. Oswald's own account survives only as other people's memories of unrecorded questioning.

That gap is part of why, within a week, President Johnson created a commission to investigate. On November 29, 1963, he signed Executive Order 11130, which set up the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, soon known as the Warren Commission.[121] Part Three covers its work.

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[117] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 241, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[118] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[119] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[120] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[121] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. ix, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The State of Texas

Texas also took part. The Attorney General of Texas, Waggoner Carr, worked with the Commission, and in January 1964 his office handed over a large set of investigative materials, mostly Dallas police reports.[122]

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Oswald was questioned for about 12 hours with no recording; he denied the shootings; he was charged with both murders; and he was shot by Jack Ruby on live television at about 11:20 a.m. on Sunday, November 24, and died at 1:07 p.m.[123]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission judged that the release of evidence to the press over that weekend would have seriously harmed Oswald's chance at a fair trial.[124] That is the Commission's judgment, and I found no later official body that disputed it.
- **Unknown:** What Oswald would have said at trial, and how a jury would have judged the evidence. That question cannot be answered.

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[122] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. xi-xii, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[123] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 16-17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 180, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 199, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[124] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 239, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Two: Oswald and Ruby

Two men are at the center of every theory about Dallas: Lee Harvey Oswald, who was charged with the assassination, and Jack Ruby, who killed him. Part Two looks at who they were, what the government knew about Oswald before November 22, and what the investigators concluded about Ruby.

Chapter 4: Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?

Lee Harvey Oswald was 24 years old when he was arrested. In his short life he had been a Marine, a defector to the Soviet Union, a returning husband and father, and a self-described Marxist who handed out pro-Castro leaflets on the streets of New Orleans. This chapter follows the record of his life up to the fall of 1963. Chapter 5 covers his trips to New Orleans and Mexico City and what the FBI and CIA knew about him.

Childhood

Oswald was born in New Orleans on October 18, 1939, two months after his father died. His mother, Marguerite Claverie Oswald, had two older sons: John Pic, a half-brother from an earlier marriage, and Robert Oswald, Lee's full brother, five years older.[125] When Lee was 3, his mother placed him in an orphanage where his brothers were already living, mainly because she had to work.[126]

His childhood was marked by frequent moves. The family lived in Dallas, Benbrook and Fort Worth in Texas, and in Covington, Louisiana. His mother's third marriage, to Edwin A. Ekdahl, ended in divorce before Lee was 9.[127] The Warren Commission said that during the next five and a half years in Fort Worth, his school record was average, and teachers did not report any unusual traits.[128]

New York and Youth House

In August 1952, when Lee was 12, he and his mother moved to New York City. The Commission described the year and a half there as "marked by Lee's refusals to attend school and by emotional and psychological problems of a seemingly serious nature."[129]

Because he was skipping school so often, he was sent for psychiatric study to Youth House, a New York institution for young people with truancy problems or trouble with the law. A social worker there described him as "seriously detached" and "withdrawn." She also noted

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[125] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[126] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[127] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 9-10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[128] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[129] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

"a rather pleasant, appealing quality about this emotionally starved, affectionless youngster." His tests showed above-average intelligence for his age. The chief psychiatrist recommended treatment.[130]

His mother insisted he did not need psychiatric help. In January 1954, while his case was still pending, the two moved back to New Orleans.[131]

Readers sometimes ask whether this history "explains" what happened in Dallas. I would be careful. Many children have hard childhoods and never hurt anyone. The Commission itself said it "could not make any definitive determination of Oswald's motives."[132]

Marxism and the Marines

In New Orleans, Oswald was remembered as a quiet, solitary boy who read a lot. In October 1955, shortly before his 16th birthday, he dropped out of school and tried to join the Marine Corps. He was rejected because of his age.[133] During the next year, while working as a messenger and clerk, he began reading communist literature. Before he turned 17, he wrote to the Socialist Party of America saying he believed in Marxism.[134]

He enlisted in the Marines in October 1956, six days after his 17th birthday.[135] His rifle scores matter for later chapters:

Date	Score	Rating
December 21, 1956	212	Sharpshooter, 2 points above the minimum
May 6, 1959	191	Marksman, 1 point above the minimum, on a shorter course

[130] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[131] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[132] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[133] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 10-11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[134] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[135] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Table source: Warren Commission report, page 11. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[136]

He trained in aviation basics and radar scanning and served 15 months overseas, mostly in Japan.[137] Most Marines who knew him described him as a "loner" who resented authority. He was court-martialed twice, once for having an unregistered private weapon and once for using provocative language to a noncommissioned officer.[138] During his last year, at Santa Ana, California, he showed strong interest in the Soviet Union, admired Fidel Castro, and talked about joining the Cuban army.[139]

He asked for and received an early release from active service on September 11, 1959, saying his mother needed help.[140] He stayed with her only three days.

The defection

On September 20, 1959, Oswald sailed from New Orleans for France on a freighter. He had already applied to a college in Switzerland and obtained a passport that listed the Soviet Union among the countries he planned to visit. He had saved as much as $1,500 from his Marine pay.[141]

He arrived in Moscow on October 16, 1959, and immediately applied for Soviet citizenship. On October 21, he was ordered to leave the country that evening. That afternoon, in his hotel room, he cut his left wrist in an apparent suicide attempt and was hospitalized.[142]

On October 31, Oswald walked into the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, said he wanted to give up his U.S. citizenship, and handed over a written statement. When asked why, he said, "I am a

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[136] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[137] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[138] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[139] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[140] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[141] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[142] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Marxist."[143] The HSCA added that he told embassy officials he intended to give the Soviets any information he had about the Marine Corps and radar operations.[144] He never completed the legal steps to renounce his citizenship.[145]

The Soviet government did not make him a citizen, but in January 1960 it let him stay on a year-to-year basis and sent him to Minsk, where he worked as an unskilled laborer in a radio factory.[146]

Marina and the return

By February 1961, Oswald wrote to the U.S. Embassy that he wanted to come home. The next month he met Marina Nikolaevna Prusakova, a 19-year-old pharmacist. They married on April 30, 1961.[147] A daughter was born in February 1962.[148]

The Oswalds left Moscow on June 1, 1962, helped by a $435.71 loan from the U.S. State Department. They arrived in Fort Worth, Texas, about two weeks later.[149]

The FBI interviewed Oswald twice that summer, on June 26 and August 16, 1962. The first report described him as arrogant and unwilling to say why he had gone to the Soviet Union. He denied any involvement with Soviet intelligence and promised to tell the FBI if Soviet agents ever contacted him.[150]

Dallas, 1962 to 1963

In October 1962, Oswald moved to Dallas. A group of Russian-speaking people in the area helped the family with food and clothing, mostly out of sympathy for Marina. According to

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[143] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[144] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[145] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[146] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[147] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 12, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[148] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[149] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[150] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

the Commission, Oswald himself "was disliked by almost all of this group."[151] He remained committed to Marxism and showed "disdain for democracy, capitalism, and American society in general."[152]

In February 1963, the Oswalds met Ruth Paine, who was studying Russian and befriended Marina.[153] Ruth Paine became an important witness, because her home in Irving was where Marina lived in the fall of 1963 and where Oswald's rifle was kept.

The rifle and the Walker shooting

In March 1963, a rifle was ordered by mail under the name "A. Hidell" and sent to a Dallas post office box rented by Oswald.[154] The HSCA's handwriting experts agreed that Oswald wrote the order and related documents, and concluded "the evidence is conclusive that Oswald owned" the rifle.[155]

On April 10, 1963, someone fired a rifle shot into the Dallas home of retired Major General Edwin A. Walker. The HSCA described Walker as a general who had been relieved of his post in West Germany "for distributing rightwing literature to his troops." Walker was not hurt.[156] The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald fired the shot. Marina Oswald learned of it when she confronted him about a note he had left her with instructions in case he did not come back.[157]

The HSCA looked at the Walker case again. Its firearms experts found the bullet fragment from Walker's home had characteristics similar to bullets fired from Oswald's rifle, and chemical testing showed it was probably the same type of ammunition. Its handwriting

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[151] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[152] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[153] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[154] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[155] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 53-54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 60, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[156] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 13-14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 52, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[157] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 13-14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

experts confirmed Oswald wrote the note. The committee concluded that the evidence strongly suggested Oswald was the shooter.[158] But it also noted that Dallas police reports from the time mentioned a witness who saw more than one person leaving the scene. The committee wrote that those statements "were never substantiated, and the case remains unsolved."[159]

Why does the Walker shooting matter? Because it shows, according to both investigations, that Oswald was willing to shoot at a public figure for political reasons seven months before Dallas. What do you make of the fact that Walker was a figure of the political right and Kennedy was a Democrat? Both investigations treated Oswald's politics as his own blend, not a fit with either American party.

Back to New Orleans

After the Walker shooting and money troubles, Marina suggested that her husband look for work in New Orleans. He left Dallas on April 24, 1963. Ruth Paine later drove Marina and the baby to join him.[160] Chapter 5 picks up the story there.

What the investigators said about motive

The Warren Commission did not name a single motive. It listed factors it believed shaped Oswald's character and might have influenced his decision:

- "His deep-rooted resentment of all authority"
- "His inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people"
- "His urge to try to find a place in history and despair at times over failures in his various undertakings"
- "His capacity for violence as evidenced by his attempt to kill General Walker"
- "His avowed commitment to Marxism and communism, as he understood the terms"

Source for the list: Warren Commission report, pages 22-23.[161]

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[158] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 60-61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[159] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[160] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[161] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 22-23, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The HSCA agreed that each of those factors described Oswald accurately. It went further, concluding that Oswald was "preoccupied with political ideology" and that, absent stronger evidence, his politics "offered a reasonable explanation of his motive to kill the President."[162]

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Oswald served in the Marines, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959, returned in 1962 with a Russian wife, and was interviewed twice by the FBI that summer. Records and handwriting experts tie him to the mail-order rifle.[163]
- **Interpretation:** Both the Warren Commission and the HSCA concluded that Oswald fired at General Walker in April 1963 and that his political beliefs were central to his motive in Dallas. Those are the investigators' conclusions, drawn from physical evidence and Marina Oswald's testimony.[164]
- **Unknown:** Oswald's actual motive. He never explained himself, and he denied the shootings. The HSCA also left open whether anyone helped him in the Walker shooting.[165]

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[162] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[163] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 11-13, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 53-54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[164] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 13-14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 60-61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[165] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 5: New Orleans, Mexico City and What the Agencies Knew

The last six months of Oswald's life raise the hardest questions in the case. He handed out pro-Castro leaflets, got into a street scuffle with anti-Castro Cubans, went on the radio, traveled to Mexico City, and visited the Cuban and Soviet diplomatic offices there. The FBI and the CIA both knew some of this before November 22. This chapter lays out what the record shows about those months and what the agencies did with what they knew.

The Fair Play for Cuba Committee

The Fair Play for Cuba Committee was a national group that supported Fidel Castro's government. In New Orleans in the summer of 1963, Oswald formed what the Warren Commission called a "fictitious" local chapter. He posed as its secretary and named the president as "A. J. Hidell." The Commission found that Hidell was "a completely fictitious person created by Oswald, the organization's only member."[166]

On August 9, 1963, Oswald was arrested after a scuffle while he was handing out pro-Castro leaflets.[167] The Assassination Records Review Board summarized what happened: an anti-Castro activist named Carlos Bringuier and two others went to counter the demonstration, recognized Oswald, and argued with him, and both sides were arrested for disturbing the peace. Oswald pleaded guilty and was fined $10. The charges against Bringuier and his friends were dismissed.[168]

The next day, at the police station, Oswald asked to see the FBI. He gave the agent false information about his background and was evasive about the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.[169] In the following two weeks, he appeared on radio programs twice as the group's New Orleans spokesman.[170]

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[166] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[167] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[168] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part I, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[169] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[170] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Here is something odd. Some of the leaflets Oswald handed out were stamped with the address 544 Camp Street.[171] That address was another entrance to the Newman Building, where a former FBI agent named Guy Banister ran a private detective agency, and where an anti-Castro group had once had an office.[172] Why would a pro-Castro activist stamp the address of a building linked to anti-Castro activity on his leaflets?

What the HSCA found in New Orleans

The HSCA looked hard at Oswald's New Orleans contacts. Its findings were mixed.

- It found no relationship between Oswald and Carlos Bringuier's anti-Castro group beyond the street confrontation. It tended to agree with Bringuier that Oswald may have been trying to infiltrate anti-Castro groups to gather information about them.[173]
- It believed six witnesses from Clinton, Louisiana, including a state representative, a deputy sheriff and a registrar of voters, who said they saw Oswald there in late summer 1963. The committee found them "credible and significant" and was "inclined to believe" that Oswald was in Clinton in late August or early September 1963 and "that he was in the company of David Ferrie, if not Clay Shaw."[174]
- It found "at least possibility that Oswald and Guy Banister were acquainted," based partly on the 544 Camp Street address and on Banister's secretary, who told the committee she saw Oswald in Banister's office several times.[175]

David Ferrie was an anti-Castro activist and pilot. Clay Shaw was a New Orleans businessman who was later charged by District Attorney Jim Garrison. Chapter 12 covers the Garrison case.

The HSCA said it was "puzzled" by Oswald's apparent link to Ferrie, whose anti-Castro views were "so distant from those of Oswald."[176] It did not find that any of these contacts proved a conspiracy. These are the committee's interpretations, and they are among the parts of the HSCA report that conspiracy researchers cite most often.

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[171] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 140, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[172] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 143, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[173] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[174] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[175] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[176] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The visit to Silvia Odio

One of the most debated episodes in Oswald's last months involves a visit he may have made to a Cuban exile in Dallas just before his trip to Mexico. The HSCA called it the reported contact between Oswald and anti-Castro Cubans "that has gained the most attention over the years."[177]

Her account. Silvia Odio was a member of an anti-Castro group known as JURE (the Cuban Revolutionary Junta). She did not go to the FBI herself; the FBI contacted her after hearing about a conversation she had with a neighbor. She told the Warren Commission that in late September 1963, three men came to her Dallas home to ask for help with a fundraising letter. Two appeared to be Cubans and used the "war" names "Leopoldo" and "Angelo." The third, an American, was introduced as "Leon Oswald."[178]

The next day, she said, one of the Cubans called her. He said the American had been a Marine, "was an excellent shot," and had said that President Kennedy "should have been assassinated after the Bay of Pigs." Odio said the American was Lee Harvey Oswald. Her sister, who saw the men briefly at the door, believed the same. Odio placed the visit on September 26 or 27 and was positive it was before October 1.[179]

The Warren Commission's view. The Commission was persuaded that Oswald could not have been in Dallas on those dates, because it had evidence he was on a bus from Houston to Mexico City on September 26. Its report concluded that "Lee Harvey Oswald was not at Mrs. Odio's apartment in September 1963," while admitting the FBI had not finished investigating.[180]

Not everyone on the Commission's own staff agreed. Assistant counsel J. Wesley Liebeler, who had taken Odio's testimony, wrote in a September 1964 memo, "There really is no evidence at all that [Oswald] left Houston on that bus," and warned, "There are problems. Odio may well be right. The Commission will look bad if it turns out that she is."[181]

The FBI then reported that a man named Loran Hall said he had visited Odio with two companions, and that Oswald was not one of them. The two companions denied ever

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[177] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 137, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[178] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 137, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[179] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 137, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[180] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 137-138, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[181] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 138, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

meeting her, and Hall later retracted his story. The HSCA called it "an admitted fabrication."[182]

The HSCA's view. The HSCA took sworn testimony from Odio, her family and her psychiatrist, who confirmed she had told him about the visit before the assassination.[183] It concluded:

> "The committee was inclined to believe Silvia Odio. From the evidence provided in the sworn testimony of the witnesses, it appeared that three men did visit her apartment in Dallas prior to the Kennedy assassination and identified themselves as members of an anti-Castro organization."[184]

It found that at least one of the men "looked like Lee Harvey Oswald and was introduced to Mrs. Odio as Leon Oswald." It disagreed with the Warren Commission that Oswald could not have been in Dallas then, but "could reach no definite conclusion on the specific date of the visit." If the visit happened on the most likely dates, Oswald "had to have had access to private transportation" to get to Mexico City when he did.[185]

The two Cuban men were never identified. The HSCA showed Odio photographs of possible suspects, and she did not recognize them.[186]

Why does this matter? If Odio was right, Oswald was in the company of two unidentified men, who presented themselves as anti-Castro activists, eight weeks before the assassination, and one of them spoke of him as a man who thought Kennedy should be shot. That is not proof of a conspiracy. But it is one of the reasons the HSCA could not rule one out, and it remains unexplained.

Mexico City

In September 1963, Ruth Paine drove Marina Oswald and the child from New Orleans back to her home in Irving, Texas. Marina was expecting her second baby in October. Oswald stayed behind and then took a bus to Mexico, arriving in Mexico City on September 27.[187]

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[182] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 138, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[183] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 138-139, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[184] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 139, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[185] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 139, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[186] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 128, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 139, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[187] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

According to the Warren Commission, he visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies there. His goal was to get permission to visit Cuba on his way to the Soviet Union. The Cubans would not give him a visa unless the Soviets gave him one first. Both efforts failed, and he returned to Dallas on October 3, 1963.[188]

The HSCA found that Oswald made at least five visits to the Soviet Embassy or the Cuban consulate.[189] Two Cuban consulate employees, Silvia Duran and Alfredo Mirabal, later identified Oswald from photographs as the man who applied for a Cuban visa. The former Cuban consul, Eusebio Azcue, insisted it was not Oswald. The committee weighed both sides and considered, but "ultimately rejected," the possibility that Azcue was trying to hide a sinister link between Oswald and the Cuban government.[190]

What the CIA knew

The CIA watched the Soviet and Cuban offices in Mexico City. According to the HSCA, CIA headquarters was told on October 9, 1963, that a man who identified himself as Oswald had contacted the Soviet Embassy on October 1. Headquarters was also told that Oswald had spoken with a man possibly identified as Soviet consul Kostikov on September 28.[191]

The Church Committee added an important detail. FBI experts on the Soviet Union knew that Kostikov was a member of the KGB, the Soviet intelligence service, and had reason to believe he worked in the KGB department that carried out "assassination and sabotage."[192]

Two more points from the record are worth knowing:

- The CIA's Mexico City station did not tell headquarters about Oswald's visa request or his visits to the Cuban consulate. So when the CIA shared his Soviet Embassy contact with other agencies, they did not learn about the Cuban part.[193]
- The CIA's first report included a photograph and description of a man it thought was Oswald. The man in the photograph was described as about 35 years old, 6 feet tall, athletic and balding, which did not match Oswald. The HSCA concluded "The man in

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[188] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[189] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 125, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[190] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 124-125, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[191] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 248-249, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[192] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 93, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[193] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 249, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

the photograph was clearly neither Oswald nor Ruby," and that the mix-up was "the result of a careless mistake," not a sign that someone was posing as Oswald.[194]

That mistaken photograph has fed decades of theories about an "Oswald impostor." The HSCA looked at it directly and rejected that explanation. Some researchers still disagree, which is why I list it among the questions the records have not fully settled.

On the bigger question, the HSCA found "no evidence of any relationship between Oswald and the CIA" in Mexico City. It noted that when the CIA learned of Oswald's possible presence there, it ran checks on him and notified other agencies, which the committee read as further evidence that he was not working for the agency.[195]

What the FBI knew

The FBI had known about Oswald since his defection. The Church Committee summarized the record:

- In late 1959, the FBI opened a "security file" on Oswald after he defected.[196]
- After his return in June 1962, he was interviewed twice by FBI agents, and "on each occasion he repeatedly lied." The FBI closed the case right after the second interview.[197]
- The case was reopened in March 1963. He was not interviewed again until August 10, 1963, in New Orleans, when he asked for the interview after his arrest, and "he again repeatedly lied."[198]

The Warren Commission's report adds detail. In March 1963, Dallas FBI agent James P. Hosty Jr. learned from a former landlady that Oswald was drinking and beating his wife, and that he subscribed to the *Worker*, a Communist Party paper. Hosty recommended reopening the case.[199] In New Orleans, the FBI did not know that Oswald had applied for and received a new passport in June 1963.[200]

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[194] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 249, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[195] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[196] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[197] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[198] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[199] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 435, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[200] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 436, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

In the fall, Hosty went to Ruth Paine's home in Irving. On November 1, he interviewed Marina Oswald there, with Ruth Paine translating, according to Hosty's later account to the Church Committee.[201] He left his name and office phone number on a slip of paper. On November 4, he called the Texas School Book Depository and learned that Oswald worked there. On November 5, he stopped by the Paine home again for a few minutes.[202]

Hosty never learned Oswald's Dallas address during those visits.[203] And the FBI did not tell the Secret Service that a former defector with a Soviet contact in Mexico City was working in a building on the motorcade route.

The Warren Commission's judgment of the FBI

The Warren Commission was careful but direct. It noted that there were no Secret Service rules that required the FBI to refer Oswald's case, and no rule to report the names of defectors. But it listed what the FBI knew: his defection, his hostility to the United States, his pro-Castro activity, his lies to agents, his trip to Mexico, and his job in the Depository on the route. It concluded that "The Commission believes, however, that the FBI took an unduly restrictive view of its responsibilities in preventive intelligence work, prior to the assassination," and that "a more alert and carefully considered treatment of the Oswald case by the Bureau might have brought about such a referral."[204]

The Church Committee went further. It reported that the FBI's own internal review found "serious investigative deficiencies" within six days of the assassination, and that "seventeen FBI personnel, including one Assistant Director, were disciplined." It added that "The fact that the FBI felt there were investigative deficiencies and the disciplinary actions it took were never publicly disclosed by the Bureau or communicated to the Warren Commission."[205]

The destroyed note

The strangest FBI story did not come out until 1975.

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[201] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 96, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[202] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 438-439, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[203] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 439, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[204] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 443, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[205] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Sometime before the assassination, Oswald walked into the Dallas FBI office, asked for Agent Hosty, and left a note in an envelope when told Hosty was out. After the assassination, the note was destroyed. The FBI did not tell the Warren Commission about it. The FBI's own inquiry began in July 1975, after a Dallas newsman asked about it.[206]

The accounts conflict on almost every point:

Question	What the record shows
When did Oswald deliver the note?	The FBI's interviews put it "some two or three weeks prior to the assassination." The same appendix later says "approximately one week or ten days prior."
What did it say?	A receptionist recalled: "Let this be a warning. I will blow up the FBI and the Dallas Police Department if you don't stop bothering my wife." Hosty recalled a milder note ending "I will take appropriate action and report this to proper authorities."
Who ordered it destroyed?	Hosty testified that the head of the Dallas office, J. Gordon Shanklin, told him to destroy it about two hours after Oswald died on November 24. Shanklin denied knowing about the note or ordering its destruction.
Why was it destroyed?	In 1975, FBI Deputy Associate Director James B. Adams told a House subcommittee that the agent destroyed it to "avoid embarrassment to the Bureau."

Table source: Church Committee, Book V, Appendix B. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[207]

The Church Committee said the evidence "contained sharp conflicts" and that the FBI's inquiry "failed to establish: (1) whether the note was threatening in nature; and (2) at whose instruction the note was destroyed."[208]

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[206] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 95, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[207] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 95-97, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[208] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 95, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

What should a reader make of this? The destroyed note does not prove a conspiracy. It does prove that the FBI hid something from the official investigation, and that it did so in part to protect its own reputation. Both things can be true at once. That pattern, institutions protecting themselves rather than hiding a plot, comes up again in Chapter 15.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Oswald ran a one-man pro-Castro group in New Orleans, visited Cuban and Soviet offices in Mexico City, and was known to the FBI and CIA before November 22. The FBI disciplined 17 employees over its handling of his case and did not tell the Warren Commission. A note Oswald left for an FBI agent was destroyed after the assassination.[209]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission judged that the FBI took "an unduly restrictive view" of its duties.[210] The HSCA was "inclined to believe" Oswald was in Clinton, Louisiana, with David Ferrie, but found no evidence of a relationship between Oswald and the CIA.[211]
- **Unknown:** What Oswald's note said, who ordered it destroyed, and why Oswald stamped 544 Camp Street on his leaflets. The Church Committee could not resolve the note, and the HSCA could not explain the Camp Street address beyond the possibility that Oswald knew Banister.[212]

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[209] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 14, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 95, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[210] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 443, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[211] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[212] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 95, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 6: Jack Ruby

On Sunday morning, November 24, 1963, Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald in front of television cameras. That one act did more than any other single event to keep the case open. If Ruby acted on his own, the country lost its only chance to try the accused assassin. If he acted for someone else, Oswald was silenced. This chapter looks at who Ruby was, how he got into the basement, and what the two main investigations concluded.

Who was Jack Ruby?

Jack Ruby was born Jacob Rubenstein in Chicago. The records disagree about his exact birth date, but the Warren Commission found "No substantial conflict" that he was born in 1911.[213] He moved to Dallas in 1947, and on December 30 of that year he legally changed his name to Jack L. Ruby.[214]

By 1963, he ran two Dallas nightspots: the Carousel Club, a downtown nightclub featuring striptease dancers, and the Vegas Club.[215] He was 52 years old in November 1963.[216]

The Warren Commission described his background this way. He grew up in a Chicago neighborhood where he knew local criminals and people who later became criminals. His friendships of that kind were "limited largely to professional gamblers." He had never been charged with a felony before he shot Oswald. His run-ins with the law in Dallas, apart from traffic tickets, came from running his clubs or from "outbursts of temper."[217] The Commission added that Ruby denied any link to organized crime, and that "law enforcement agencies have Confirmed that denial."[218]

As you will see, the HSCA reached a different view of Ruby's connections fifteen years later.

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[213] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 779, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-16.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[214] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 793, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-16.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[215] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 333, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[216] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[217] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 370, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[218] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 370-371, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The weekend

The Warren Commission traced Ruby's movements across the whole weekend in great detail. A few moments from that account help show the kind of man the record describes.

Friday, at the time of the shooting. Ruby was in the advertising office of the *Dallas Morning News*, dealing with his weekend club ads. When an employee announced that shots had been fired at the President, the advertising man with him recalled Ruby's look of "stunned disbelief." Another employee described him as "obviously shaken, and an ashen color." Ruby called his assistant at the Carousel Club and said, "If anything happens we are going to close the club."[219]

Friday afternoon, the Parkland question. A reporter, Seth Kantor, who knew Ruby, testified that Ruby stopped him inside Parkland Hospital around 1:30 p.m. and asked whether he should close his clubs. Ruby denied going to Parkland. Videotapes of the hospital scene show Kantor but not Ruby. Based on telephone records and the timeline, the Commission concluded that "Kantor probably did not see Ruby at Parkland Hospital."[220] This matters to some critics because it would put Ruby near the President's hospital within an hour of the shooting. The Commission's reading is that he was not there.

Friday and Saturday. Ruby closed his clubs for three days.[221] He attended a synagogue service on Friday night.[222] In the early morning hours of Saturday, he told a newspaper employee that he had seen Oswald that night and had corrected District Attorney Henry Wade at the press conference about the name of Oswald's pro-Castro group.[223]

Saturday night. In a phone call, a friend heard Ruby criticize rival club owners for staying open and say, "I've got to do something about this." The friend first thought Ruby meant his rivals. After Oswald was shot, he was no longer sure.[224] That night Ruby also arranged for a

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[219] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 334-335, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[220] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 336, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[221] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 337, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[222] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 340, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[223] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 344, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[224] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 349, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

garage attendant to give $5 to his dancer Karen Carlin, who performed as "Little Lynn." She told the Commission Ruby said she could call him Sunday if she needed more money.[225]

Ruby was a familiar figure around Dallas police headquarters. On Friday night, he was in the crowded assembly room during the midnight press conference where Oswald was shown to reporters.[226] The HSCA noted that this meant "Ruby's first encounter with Oswald occurred over 36 hours before he shot him."[227]

Reporters had been told on Saturday night that the transfer would not take place until after 10 a.m. on Sunday.[228] On Sunday morning, Ruby went to a Western Union office on Main Street, about 350 feet from the top of the police building's Main Street ramp. He sent a money order there. The time stamp on the receipt in his pocket showed it was accepted "at almost exactly 11:17 a.m."[229] The money went to one of his dancers, who performed as "Little Lynn."[230]

At 11:21 a.m., he shot Oswald.[231]

Four minutes is not much time. People who believe Ruby was part of a plot see the timing as too perfect. People who believe he acted alone point out that the transfer took place more than an hour after the earliest time given to the press, and that a man planning to kill Oswald would not have been waiting in line at a Western Union counter. What do you think the timing tells us, if anything?

How did Ruby get in?

This is where the two investigations split.

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[225] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 349, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[226] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[227] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 158, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[228] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[229] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 219, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[230] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 349, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 351, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[231] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The Warren Commission's view. The Commission concluded that "Although the evidence on Ruby's means of entry is not conclusive, the weight of the evidence indicates that he walked down the ramp leading from Main Street to the basement." It found "no evidence to support the rumor that Ruby may have been assisted by any members of the Dallas Police Department."[232] Video tapes showed a police car cleared the foot of the ramp 55 seconds before the shooting, and showed Ruby standing at the foot of the ramp just before he fired.[233]

The HSCA's view. The HSCA disagreed. It found that Ruby "probably did not come down the ramp" and that his most likely route was an alley next to the Dallas Municipal Building and a stairway into the basement garage.[234] Its reasons:

- The ramp route "was refuted by the eyewitness testimony of every witness in the relevant area only Ruby himself excepted."[235]
- The 55 seconds between the police car going up the ramp and the shooting left very little time for Ruby to come down the ramp after it.[236]
- The Warren Commission and Dallas police relied "heavily on Ruby's own assertions."[237]
- In his first interviews, Ruby refused to say how he got in or whether anyone helped him. Only later did he say he walked down the ramp.[238]

The HSCA also found that the Dallas Police Department "withheld relevant information" from the Warren Commission about Ruby's entry. The officer in charge of basement security, Sergeant Patrick Dean, took a polygraph test in 1964, and the Commission was never told. Dean told the HSCA he had "failed" the test, but the committee could not find the actual questions or results.[239]

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[232] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[233] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 219, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[234] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[235] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[236] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[237] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[238] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[239] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 158, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Planned or spontaneous?

Ruby said he acted on impulse. He told police he shot Oswald in "a temporary fit of depression and rage" over the President's death.[240] He later told the Commission that he read a newspaper item that Sunday morning suggesting "that Mrs. Kennedy may have to come back for the trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," and said "I don't know what bug got ahold of me."[241]

The two investigations read this differently.

Question	Warren Commission (1964)	HSCA (1979)
How did Ruby enter?	Probably the Main Street ramp	Probably an alley and stairway, not the ramp
Did he have help?	No evidence that police assisted him	"Less likely" he got in without help, though any helper may not have known his intent
Was it planned?	Treated as the act of an emotional man	"Not a spontaneous act," involving "at least some premeditation"
Was he part of a conspiracy to kill the President?	No evidence	Did not find that he was; raised "disturbing questions"

Table sources: Warren Commission report, page 21; HSCA report, pages 157-158. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[242]

It is important to read the HSCA's words carefully. It said it "believed that it was less likely that Ruby entered the police basement without assistance, even though the assistance may have been provided with no knowledge of Ruby's intentions. The assistance may have been in the form of information about plans for Oswald's transfer or aid in entering the building

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[240] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[241] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 353-354, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-6.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[242] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 157-158, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

or both."[243] That is a finding that someone may have helped Ruby get in. It is not a finding that anyone helped him kill Oswald.

The HSCA listed what troubled it: unlocked doors along the stairway route, security guards moved away from the garage area shortly before the shooting, a Saturday night phone call in which Ruby's closest friend asked him if he was crazy, and the conduct of several officers present when Ruby was first questioned.[244]

Ruby and organized crime

The HSCA spent a great deal of effort on Ruby's ties to organized crime. It found "abundant evidence that Ruby was knowledgeable about and known to organized crime elements."[245] It looked, for example, at the claim that Ruby met organized crime figure Santos Trafficante in Cuba in 1959. It found a meeting "a distinct possibility," but said the evidence "was not sufficient to form a final conclusion."[246]

But the committee then stopped itself. It wrote that "knowledge or availability through association falls considerably short of the sort of evidence that would be necessary to establish criminal responsibility for a conspiracy in the assassination."[247] It also concluded that "Neither Oswald nor Ruby turned out to be 'loners,' as they had been painted in the 1964 investigation."[248]

So there is a real conflict between the two official bodies here. The Warren Commission said law enforcement confirmed Ruby's denial of organized crime ties. The HSCA found that he was known to organized crime figures. I present both. The later investigation had access to more information, and its finding on Ruby's associations is better supported. But neither body found evidence that Ruby killed Oswald on anyone's orders.

The trial and after

Ruby was indicted for Oswald's murder on November 26, 1963, convicted on March 14, 1964, and sentenced to death.[249] He also took a polygraph examination for the Warren

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[243] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[244] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[245] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 179, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[246] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 152-153, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[247] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 179, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[248] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 180, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[249] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Commission. The Commission's appendix on that test stressed that the results depended on whether Ruby was mentally sound, because "the polygraph tracings could not be logically interpreted" on a person divorced from reality.[250]

According to the Assassination Records Review Board, in October 1966 the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals reversed the verdict and ordered a new trial. Ruby died of cancer three months later, before the new trial began. The Board noted that Ruby always maintained that he was not involved in the assassination and had not known Oswald before hearing his name in connection with it.[251]

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Ruby sent a money order at about 11:17 a.m., shot Oswald at 11:21 a.m., was convicted in 1964, won a new trial on appeal in 1966, and died before it began. The Dallas police did not tell the Warren Commission about Sergeant Dean's 1964 polygraph.[252]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission concluded Ruby probably came down the ramp without police help. The HSCA concluded he probably came another way, probably had some help getting in, and acted with some premeditation. Both are interpretations of the same evidence, and they conflict.[253]
- **Unknown:** Who, if anyone, helped Ruby get into the basement, and whether that person knew what Ruby planned to do. The HSCA could not answer either question.[254]

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[250] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 814, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-17.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[251] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[252] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 219, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-5.html, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 158, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[253] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[254] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Three: The Warren Commission

The Warren Commission's report is still the starting point for nearly every discussion of Dallas. Supporters treat it as the careful work of serious people. Critics treat it as a rushed job built to calm the country. Part Three looks at how the Commission was set up, how it worked, what it found, and what later investigators said about it.

Chapter 7: How the Commission Worked and What It Found

Why a commission?

In the days after Dallas, there were several investigations starting at once. The FBI was investigating. Texas officials planned a court of inquiry. Members of both houses of Congress talked about holding hearings. The Warren Commission's own foreword says that President Johnson created the Commission partly to avoid "parallel investigations" and to concentrate the fact-finding in one body.[255]

On November 29, 1963, one week after the assassination, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11130, creating the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy.[256] On December 13, 1963, Congress passed a joint resolution giving the Commission power to subpoena witnesses and evidence and to compel testimony from witnesses who claimed the privilege against self-incrimination.[257]

Who served

The Commission had seven members, chosen from both parties and from different parts of government.[258]

Member	Role at the time
Earl Warren, Chairman	Chief Justice of the United States
Richard B. Russell	U.S. Senator, Democrat of Georgia
John Sherman Cooper	U.S. Senator, Republican of Kentucky
Hale Boggs	U.S. Representative, Democrat of

[255] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. x, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[256] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. ix, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[257] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. x, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[258] Warren Commission, title page, members and letter of transmittal to President Johnson, September 24, 1964, in *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/letter.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 256-257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Member	Role at the time
	Louisiana
Gerald R. Ford	U.S. Representative, Republican of Michigan
Allen W. Dulles	Former Director of Central Intelligence
John J. McCloy	Former president of the World Bank

Table sources: Warren Commission title page and members list; HSCA report, pages 256-257. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[259]

J. Lee Rankin, a former Solicitor General of the United States, was sworn in as general counsel on December 16, 1963. Fourteen lawyers were appointed as assistant counsel within a few weeks.[260]

One name on that list matters a great deal for later chapters. Allen Dulles had led the CIA during the years when the agency plotted against Fidel Castro. The Church Committee later wrote that Dulles "presumably knew about CIA plots during his tenure with the Agency, although he probably was unaware of the AMLASH operation," a plot that was active in 1963.[261] Chapter 15 covers what the Commission was never told.

No investigators of its own

Here is the most important structural fact about the Warren Commission. According to the HSCA, "The Commission did not employ its own investigative staff. Instead, it relied on agencies in place---the FBI and Secret Service for domestic aspects, the CIA for activities involving foreign countries."[262]

That meant the Commission's lawyers reviewed and tested evidence gathered largely by the same agencies whose own conduct was part of the story. The FBI had known about Oswald. The Secret Service had protected the President. The CIA had watched Oswald in Mexico City.

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[259] Warren Commission, title page, members and letter of transmittal to President Johnson, September 24, 1964, in *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/letter.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 256-257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[260] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[261] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[262] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The scale of the agency work was large. The Commission reported that the FBI conducted about 25,000 interviews and re-interviews and, by September 11, 1964, had sent over 2,300 reports totaling about 25,400 pages.[263]

Testimony

Beginning on February 3, 1964, the Commission and its staff took the testimony of 552 witnesses. Of those, 94 appeared before members of the Commission, 395 were questioned by the legal staff, 61 gave sworn affidavits and 2 gave statements.[264]

The Commission delivered its report to President Johnson on September 24, 1964.[265] Its supporting hearings and exhibits filled 26 volumes.[266]

Is ten months long enough for an investigation like this? The HSCA described it as "a 9-month effort."[267] Critics have argued it was too fast. Defenders point out that the Commission's core findings about Oswald have held up through every later review. Keep that tension in mind.

What the Commission concluded

The Commission's main conclusions, in its own words where possible:

Where the shots came from. "The shots which killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor Connally were fired from the sixth floor window at the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository."[268]

How many shots. "The weight of the evidence indicates that there were three shots fired."[269]

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[263] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. xii, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[264] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. xiii, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[265] Warren Commission, title page, members and letter of transmittal to President Johnson, September 24, 1964, in *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/letter.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[266] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[267] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[268] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[269] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The single bullet. The Commission said that while it was not necessary to decide which shot hit Governor Connally, "there is very persuasive evidence from the experts to indicate that the same bullet which pierced the President's throat also caused Governor Connally's wounds." It added that "Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some difference of opinion as to this probability."[270]

Who fired. "The shots which killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor Connally were fired by Lee Harvey Oswald."[271] The Commission based that on seven points: Oswald owned the rifle, carried it into the building, was at the window, left the rifle and a paper bag on the sixth floor, could have fired the shots in the time available, lied to police, and had tried to kill General Walker.[272]

Officer Tippit. Oswald killed Officer Tippit about 45 minutes after the assassination. Nine eyewitnesses identified him, and the cartridge cases at the scene came from his revolver "to the exclusion of all other weapons."[273]

Jack Ruby. Ruby entered the police basement shortly after 11:17 a.m., probably by the Main Street ramp, and the Commission found no evidence that any police officer helped him.[274]

Conspiracy. "The Commission has found no evidence that either Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby was part of any conspiracy, domestic or foreign, to assassinate President Kennedy."[275] It also found "nothing to support the speculation that Oswald was an agent, employee, or informant of the FBI, the CIA, or any other governmental agency."[276]

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[270] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[271] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[272] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 19-20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[273] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[274] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[275] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[276] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The sentence people skip

Right before its final conclusion, the Commission wrote a sentence that is often left out when people summarize the report:

> "Because of the difficulty of proving negatives to a certainty the possibility of others being involved with either Oswald or Ruby cannot be established categorically, but if there is any such evidence it has been beyond the reach of all the investigative agencies and resources of the United States and has not come to the attention of this Commission."[277]

Then came the conclusion: "On the basis of the evidence before the Commission it concludes that Oswald acted alone."[278]

Notice the hedge. The Commission did not claim to have proven that no one else was involved. It said it found no evidence of anyone else. Those are different claims, and the difference matters when we get to the HSCA's criticism that the conclusions were "too definitive."

A claim that did not hold up

The Commission also wrote this about its own work: "all Government agencies have fully discharged their responsibility to cooperate with the Commission in its investigation."[279]

Later investigations showed that this was not true. The CIA did not tell the Commission about its plots to kill Fidel Castro. The FBI did not tell the Commission that it had disciplined 17 employees over its handling of the Oswald case, or that an agent had destroyed a note Oswald left at the FBI office.[280] The Dallas police did not tell it about Sergeant Dean's polygraph.[281]

This does not mean the Commission lied. The Commission appears to have believed what it wrote. It means the Commission did not know what it did not know.

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[277] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[278] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[279] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[280] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 9-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 95, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[281] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 158, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Criticisms of the police and the Secret Service

The report was not a whitewash of everyone involved. It was openly critical in several areas:

- It found that the Dallas police's decision to move Oswald "in full public view was unsound," and that letting reporters stay in the basement after threats to Oswald's life "contributed to the death of Lee Harvey Oswald."[282]
- It found that statements by local officials to the press "would have presented serious obstacles to the obtaining of a fair trial for Oswald."[283]
- It concluded that the FBI took "an unduly restrictive view of its responsibilities in preventive intelligence work."[284]
- It made a long list of recommendations for improving presidential protection.[285]

A closer look: protecting the President

The Commission's chapter on presidential protection is one of the most candid parts of the report, and it is often overlooked. Here is what it found, and what the HSCA added fifteen years later.

Finding the dangerous people in advance

The Secret Service had a unit called the Protective Research Section, which collected and evaluated information about people who might be a danger to the President. The Commission concluded that "at the time of the assassination the arrangements relied upon by the Secret Service to perform this function were seriously deficient."[286] At the time, about 100 people were in the Service's "trip index file" of those considered a significant danger.[287] Oswald was not among them.

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[282] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[283] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[284] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 443, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[285] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 23-27, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[286] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 429, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[287] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 430, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The Commission said the section's efforts "appear to have been too largely directed at the 'crank' threat," meaning people who wrote threatening letters, rather than people whose activities and background suggested danger.[288] And as Chapter 5 showed, the FBI did not tell the Secret Service what it knew about Oswald.[289]

The motorcade route

The Secret Service's advance agent for Dallas, Winston G. Lawson, "did not arrange for a prior inspection of buildings along the motorcade route, either by police or by custodians of the buildings, since it was not the usual practice of the Secret Service to do so."[290] The Commission also said the Secret Service had "inadequately defined the responsibilities of its advance agents."[291]

In the motorcade itself, the Commission said agents in the follow-up car were expected to scan nearby buildings, but it did "not believe that agents stationed in a car behind the Presidential car, who must concentrate primarily on the possibility of threats from crowds along the route, provide a significant safeguard against dangers in nearby buildings."[292]

The night before

The report also described an incident that critics still raise. In the early morning hours of November 22, in Fort Worth, nine off-duty agents went to the Fort Worth Press Club around midnight. All of them had a drink, by their own accounts no more than three glasses of beer or one and a half mixed drinks. Seven later went to a coffee house, where no alcohol was served. The last agent left at about 5 a.m. Four of the nine were assigned to the follow-up car in the Dallas motorcade.[293]

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[288] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 432, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[289] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 443, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[290] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 447, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[291] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 445, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[292] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 449, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[293] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 449-450, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Secret Service rules banned drinking by agents on presidential trips.[294] The Secret Service chief, James Rowley, chose not to discipline the agents, because he felt that doing so might suggest their conduct had contributed to the assassination, which he did not believe.[295]

The Commission's judgment was careful. It said it was "conceivable" that agents who had little sleep and some alcohol "might have been more alert in the Dallas motorcade if they had retired promptly in Fort Worth." But it added, "there is no evidence that these men failed to take any action in Dallas within their power that would have averted the tragedy."[296]

What the HSCA added

The HSCA went further than the Warren Commission. Its finding was that "President John F. Kennedy did not receive adequate protection," and that the Secret Service had information "that was not properly analyzed, investigated or used" for the Dallas trip.[297]

It described two threats from November 1963 that the Secret Service did not fully use:

- **Chicago.** On October 30, 1963, the Secret Service learned that a Chicago man who was outspokenly opposed to the President's foreign policy had several weapons. He was arrested on November 2, the day of a planned presidential trip to Chicago that was canceled, with an M-1 rifle, a handgun and 3,000 rounds of ammunition in his car. The committee could not determine exactly why the trip was canceled.[298]
- **Miami.** On November 9, 1963, a Miami police informant secretly recorded a right-wing extremist, Joseph A. Milteer, suggesting a plot to kill the President "From an office building with a high-powered rifle." Miami police gave the Secret Service a transcript.[299]

The HSCA investigated whether either man had anything to do with Dallas. It found no connection between Milteer's associates and Oswald or Ruby, and could develop no additional information on the Chicago man.[300] Its criticism was about protection, not

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[294] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 451, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[295] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 451, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[296] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 451, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-8.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[297] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[298] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 230-231, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[299] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 232, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[300] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 234, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

conspiracy: if the threats the Secret Service knew about had been passed to the agents planning the Dallas trip, "additional precautions might have been taken."[301]

On the agents' performance during the shooting, the HSCA found that they "performed professionally and reacted quickly to the danger," consistent with their instructions. But it concluded they were "inadequately prepared for an attack by a concealed sniper," and that greater awareness "could have decreased reaction time."[302]

The HSCA also recorded the tension between protection and politics. President Kennedy traveled often, liked crowds and "scoffed at many of the measures designed to protect him." His aide Kenneth O'Donnell once told the head of the White House detail, "Politics and protection don't mix."[303]

What the HSCA said about the Commission

Fifteen years later, the House Select Committee on Assassinations reviewed the Commission's work. Its findings were split:

- "The Warren Commission conducted a thorough and professional investigation into the responsibility of Lee Harvey Oswald for the assassination."
- "The Warren Commission failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy to assassinate the President. This deficiency was attributable in part to the failure of the Commission to receive all the relevant information that was in the possession of other agencies and departments."
- "The Warren Commission arrived at its conclusions, based on the evidence available to it, in good faith."
- "The Warren Commission presented the conclusions in its report in a fashion that was too definitive."

Source for all four findings: HSCA report, summary of findings.[304]

The HSCA was careful about blame. It wrote that "In large measure, the Warren Commission's inadequacies in investigating important aspects of the President's

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[301] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 234, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[302] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 234, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[303] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 228, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[304] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

assassination were the result of failures by the CIA and the FBI to provide it with all relevant evidence and information."[305]

How should we judge it?

Here is my reading of the record, which you should treat as interpretation.

On the core questions of who fired the shots that killed the President and where they came from, the Warren Commission's findings have been confirmed by every later official investigation, including the HSCA, which said Oswald fired the shots that struck the President from the sixth-floor window.[306]

On the question of whether anyone else was involved, the Commission's investigation was limited by what the agencies chose to tell it. Its "no evidence" conclusion was honest, but it rested on an incomplete record. That is the HSCA's view too.

Those two judgments do not cancel each other out. A report can be right about the shooter and incomplete about the background at the same time.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The Commission was created by Executive Order 11130 on November 29, 1963, had no investigative staff of its own, heard 552 witnesses, and delivered its report on September 24, 1964. The CIA and FBI withheld important information from it.[307]
- **Interpretation:** The HSCA judged the Commission thorough on Oswald, inadequate on conspiracy, honest, and "too definitive."[308] That is one official body's judgment of another.
- **Unknown:** Whether the Commission would have reached different conclusions if the CIA and FBI had told it everything. No one can test that.

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[305] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[306] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[307] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. ix, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. xiii, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/foreword.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 257, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[308] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Four: The Evidence

Part Four goes through the physical evidence: the rifle, the cartridge cases and the sixth floor; the number and timing of the shots; the single bullet finding; and the Zapruder film and medical evidence. This is where both official investigations spent most of their effort, and where they mostly agree. It is also where many of the most popular claims live.

Chapter 8: The Rifle, the Shells and the Sixth Floor

The rifle

The rifle found on the sixth floor was a 6.5-millimeter Mannlicher-Carcano, an Italian military rifle, with serial number C2766 and a telescopic sight.[309]

Tracing it took one night. The importer's records showed it had been shipped to Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago. Klein's officers searched their records from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. and found that the rifle with that serial number had been shipped to "A. Hidell" at a Dallas post office box.[310]

According to Klein's microfilm records, the company received an order for the rifle on March 13, 1963. The envelope held an order coupon and a U.S. postal money order for $21.45, bought in Dallas on March 12. The price covered $19.95 for the rifle and scope plus postage and handling.[311]

Who was "A. Hidell"? The Warren Commission found that the handwriting on the order and the post office box application was Oswald's, and that Hidell was a made-up name Oswald used.[312] The HSCA had the handwriting reexamined by its own experts and reached the same result.[313] Oswald also carried a Selective Service card with his photograph and the name "Alek J. Hidell" when he was arrested.[314]

The palmprint on the barrel

This piece of evidence has an unusual history, and it is worth getting right.

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[309] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[310] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 118, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[311] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 119, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[312] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 122, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[313] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 53-54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[314] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

When the rifle was found, Lieutenant J. C. Day of the Dallas police examined it. He saw traces of two fingerprints near the trigger housing. The FBI's fingerprint expert, Sebastian Latona, later said those prints were "of no value" for identification.[315]

But before handing the rifle to the FBI, Day had lifted a palmprint from the underside of the barrel, under the wooden stock, using adhesive tape. The lift was so complete that no trace was left on the rifle for the FBI to see. Day did not send the lifted print to the FBI until November 26, and it reached the FBI laboratory on November 29.[316]

Three experts, including one from the New York City Police Department working for the Commission, identified the print as Oswald's right palm. FBI tests also confirmed that the adhesive bearing the print showed the same irregularities as the rifle barrel, which tied the lift to that rifle.[317]

Critics have pointed out the delay and the fact that the FBI never saw the print on the rifle itself. That is a fair point about chain of custody. The Commission also noted that the experts could not say when the print was placed on the rifle.[318] The print shows that Oswald handled the rifle at some point, not that he handled it on November 22.

The paper bag

On Thursday, November 21, Oswald asked his coworker Buell Wesley Frazier for a ride to Irving, saying "I'm going home to get some curtain rods."[319] The next morning, Frazier and his sister, Linnie Mae Randle, saw Oswald carry a long package wrapped in brown paper to the car.[320]

Near the southeast corner window, police found a handmade brown paper bag. Lieutenant Day wrote on it at the scene: "Found next to the sixth floor window gun fired from. May

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[315] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 122-123, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[316] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 123, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[317] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 123-124, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[318] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 124, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[319] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 130, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[320] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 133, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

have been used to carry gun."[321] The FBI laboratory found Oswald's left index fingerprint and right palmprint on that bag.[322]

There is a real conflict here. Randle estimated the package she saw was about 27 or 28 inches long. The largest part of the disassembled rifle, the wooden stock, measured 34.8 inches. When Frazier showed the Commission how Oswald carried the package, with one end cupped in his hand and the other under his armpit, the disassembled rifle was too long to be carried that way.[323]

The Commission weighed this and "concluded that Frazier and Randle are mistaken as to the length of the bag." It noted that Randle saw the bag only briefly and that Frazier said he was not paying close attention.[324] That is the Commission's interpretation. The witnesses' estimates are part of the record, and readers should know they exist. The Commission also noted that "No curtain rods were known to have been discovered in the Depository Building after the assassination."[325]

The sixth floor

The Commission described the corner as an arranged sniper's nest. A large carton had been moved under the window. Two smaller cartons labeled "Rolling Readers," moved from a stack about three aisles away, were placed on top and on the windowsill. They "appeared to have been arranged as a convenient gun rest." Another carton behind them gave a seated person a view down Elm Street.[326]

The FBI developed 20 fingerprints and 8 palmprints on the cartons. The carton on the windowsill and the large carton under the window had no prints identified as Oswald's. But one of the "Rolling Readers" cartons carried his left palmprint and right index fingerprint.[327] A palmprint on the carton behind the window, in the position of someone seated facing the

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[321] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 135, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[322] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 135, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[323] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 133-134, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[324] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 134, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[325] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 130, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[326] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 140, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[327] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 140, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

window with a hand by his right hip, was identified as Oswald's right palm. The FBI expert said that print was less than three days old.[328] Since Oswald worked in the building and handled boxes as part of his job, the Commission gave the carton prints "some probative value" rather than treating them as proof.[329]

Was Oswald on the sixth floor that morning? A coworker, Charles Givens, testified that he saw Oswald on the sixth floor with a clipboard, walking from the southeast corner toward the elevator, shortly before noon. Givens thought this was about 11:55 a.m.[330]

Three cartridge cases were found near the window.[331]

Eyewitnesses to the window

Howard Brennan, sitting across the street, said he saw a man fire a rifle from the southeast corner window.[332] A 15-year-old, Amos L. Euins, also saw the gunman as the shots were fired and was one of the first witnesses to tell police the shots came from the Depository.[333] Two Depository employees, Harold Norman and James Jarman Jr., were watching from the fifth floor directly below. When they came outside, they heard Brennan describing what he had seen.[334]

Brennan's identification of Oswald was not firm. On the evening of November 22, he picked Oswald in a lineup as the person who most closely resembled the man in the window, but said he could not make a positive identification. He had already seen Oswald's picture on television. The Commission therefore said it "does not base its conclusion concerning the

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[328] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 140-141, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[329] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 141, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[330] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 143, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[331] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[332] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 5, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[333] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 147, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[334] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

identity of the assassin on Brennan's subsequent certain identification of Lee Harvey Oswald."[335]

Ballistics: does the evidence match the rifle?

This is one of the strongest links in the case, and both investigations agree on it.

The Warren Commission found that the nearly whole bullet found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, and two large bullet fragments found in the front seat of the limousine, "were fired from the 6.5-millimeter Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found on the sixth floor of the Depository Building to the exclusion of all other weapons." It found the same for the three cartridge cases.[336]

The HSCA had its own panel of firearms experts look again in 1978. It reached the same result: the stretcher bullet, the two limousine fragments and the three cartridge cases were fired in that rifle.[337] The panel added a detail. Because the rifle had been test-fired many times since 1963, its barrel had worn, and new test bullets no longer matched the old evidence. But the evidence in the National Archives matched the bullets the FBI had test-fired from the rifle in 1964.[338]

Both bodies also agreed that the Tippit cartridge cases came from the revolver Oswald was carrying when he was arrested.[339]

The backyard photographs

When police searched the Paine garage, they found photographs of Oswald standing in a backyard holding a rifle, with a pistol on his hip, and holding two leftist newspapers. Marina Oswald testified that she took them in March or April 1963 at their home on Neely Street in Dallas.[340] Oswald told police his face had been pasted onto someone else's body.[341]

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[335] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 145-146, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[336] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[337] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[338] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[339] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 59, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[340] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The HSCA asked a panel of photographic experts to test that claim. Working from the original materials, the panel "could find no evidence of fakery." The committee noted that some critics who claimed the photos were faked had relied on poor-quality copies.[342] The committee also obtained a newly surfaced copy of one photo with an inscription on the back: "To my dear friend George, from Lee," dated April 1963 and signed "Lee Harvey Oswald."[343] George de Mohrenschildt was a friend of the Oswalds in Dallas.

The man in the doorway

A famous photograph taken during the shooting shows a man standing in the Depository doorway. Some critics argued it was Oswald, which would have put him outside during the shots. The Warren Commission found the man was another employee, Billy Lovelady. The HSCA reviewed the challenge and agreed with the Commission.[344]

Pulling it together

Here is the physical evidence linking Oswald to the rifle and the window, as found by the two main official investigations:

Evidence	Warren Commission (1964)	HSCA (1979)
Rifle ordered under the name "A. Hidell" in Oswald's handwriting	Yes	Yes
Oswald's palmprint lifted from the rifle barrel	Yes	Not retested in the report sections reviewed
Oswald's prints on the paper bag found by the window	Yes	Not retested in the report sections reviewed
Bullet and fragments fired from this rifle	Yes, to the exclusion of all other weapons	Yes
Three cartridge cases fired in this rifle	Yes	Yes

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[341] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 16, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[342] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 55, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[343] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 56, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[344] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Evidence	Warren Commission (1964)	HSCA (1979)
Backyard photos of Oswald with the rifle are genuine	Yes	Yes, no evidence of fakery
Oswald on the sixth floor shortly before the shooting	Yes	Yes

Table sources: Warren Commission report, pages 18-20 and 118-145; HSCA report, pages 1-2 and 50-58. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[345]

What would it take to break this chain? A critic would have to show that several independent pieces of evidence, handled by different people and tested by different expert panels years apart, were all wrong or all faked. That is not impossible in principle. But no official body has found evidence of it.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The rifle on the sixth floor was ordered in Oswald's handwriting under an alias, and the bullet and fragments recovered in Dallas were fired from it. Two separate investigations, fourteen years apart, reached that result.[346]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald carried the rifle into the building in the paper bag, despite two witnesses' shorter estimates of the package. That is the Commission's reading of conflicting evidence.[347]
- **Unknown:** When Oswald's palmprint was placed on the rifle barrel. The experts said that could not be determined.[348]

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[345] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 18-20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 118-145, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 50-58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[346] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 53-54, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[347] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 133-135, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 9: How Many Shots, and How Fast?

"Could one man with a bolt-action rifle have done it?" That is one of the most common questions people ask about Dallas. The answer depends on how many shots were fired, when they were fired, and which ones hit. The Warren Commission and the HSCA gave different answers to some of those questions. This chapter lays them side by side.

What the witnesses heard

The Warren Commission found that "The consensus among the witnesses at the scene was that three shots were fired." Some witnesses heard only two shots, and others heard four or more.[349] Witnesses generally estimated the shots came within 5 to 6 seconds.[350]

The Commission was candid about the weakness of this evidence. It noted that once three empty cartridge cases were found, officials concluded three shots had been fired and the press spread that conclusion widely, so later witness memories may have been "subconsciously colored" by the publicity.[351] It concluded that "the preponderance of the evidence, in particular the three spent cartridges," supported three shots.[352]

How fast could the rifle be fired?

FBI marksmen tested the rifle for the Warren Commission using its telescopic sight. The Commission said, "Tests of the assassin's rifle disclosed that at least 2.3 seconds were required between shots."[353] The HSCA put the FBI's result at "approximately 2.25 to 2.3 seconds."[354]

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[348] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 124, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[349] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 110, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[350] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 117, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[351] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 111, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[352] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 111, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[353] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 97, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[354] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

That number, about 2.3 seconds, became the yardstick for everything that followed.

The Warren Commission's timeline

The Commission used the Zapruder film to time the shots. It found that the President was "probably shot through the neck between frames 210 and 225," and that the head shot struck at the frame the online text prints as "813."[355] With the camera running at 18.3 frames per second, that gave "an interval of from 4.8 to 5.6 seconds" between the two shots that hit the President.[356]

A note on the source: the National Archives' online text of the report prints "frame 813" on page 115. That cannot be right, because the Commission's own figures put the head shot 4.8 to 5.6 seconds, or about 88 to 102 frames, after frames 210 to 225, which lands near frame 312 or 313. The HSCA placed the head shot at frame 312. I treat "813" as a scanning error in the online copy and use frame 312, the HSCA figure, in this book. **[Not verified]** I did not check a printed copy of page 115.[357]

If three shots were fired and two hit, one shot missed. The Commission worked through each possibility:

If the miss was...	Total time for three shots	Commission's view
The first shot	7.1 to 7.9 seconds or more	Possible
The second shot	4.8 to 5.6 seconds	Possible, but the shooter would have been working "at very near the minimum allowable time"
The third shot	7.1 to 7.9 seconds or more	Possible; fits the idea that the farthest shot was hardest

[355] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 105, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 115, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[356] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 115, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[357] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 115, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 47, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Table source: Warren Commission report, pages 111-117. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[358]

The Commission said "The evidence is inconclusive as to whether it was the first, second, or third shot which missed."[359] Its final conclusion was that "one shot probably missed the Presidential limousine and its occupants, and that the three shots were fired in a time period ranging from approximately 4.8 to in excess of 7 seconds."[360]

The missed shot and James Tague

There is physical evidence of at least one miss. James T. Tague was standing near the Triple Underpass, between Commerce and Main Streets, when something struck him on the cheek during the shooting. A deputy sheriff found a fresh mark on the south curb of Main Street where Tague had been standing.[361] A Dallas patrolman radioed around 12:40 p.m. that he had "one guy that was possibly hit by a richochet from the bullet off the concrete."[362]

FBI tests found lead and a trace of antimony in the mark, but no copper. The Commission said this ruled out the mark being made by an intact, copper-jacketed bullet like the one found on Governor Connally's stretcher. It said the mark could have come from a fragment of the head-shot bullet or from a missed shot that broke apart on something else.[363]

Could Oswald have done it?

The Commission concluded yes. It cited two Marine marksmanship experts who "concurred in the opinion that Oswald had the capability to fire three shots, with two hits, within 4.8 and 5.6 seconds." One of them, Sergeant James A. Zahm, called the shot to the President's

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[358] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 111-117, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[359] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 111, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[360] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 117, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[361] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 116, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[362] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 116, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[363] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 116-117, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

neck "a very easy shot" with Oswald's equipment and ability. The Commission concluded that Oswald "possessed ample capability to commit the assassination."[364]

Critics point to Oswald's last Marine score, 191, just one point over the minimum for "marksman."[365] The Commission's answer was that the shots were at a relatively short range with a four-power telescopic sight, which an Army expert said would not require "an exceptional shot," only "A proficient man with this weapon, yes."[366]

A closer look: Oswald's training and the rifle tests

Because the shooting question matters so much, it is worth seeing exactly what the Commission tested and what it found. I take these points from Chapter 4 of the Warren Commission report.

The shots. The Commission said a rifleman in the sixth-floor window was firing at "a slow-moving target proceeding on a downgrade in virtually a straight line" with the rifle, at a range of 177 to 266 feet. Elm Street also slopes down about 3 degrees, which the Commission said removed some of the adjustment a shooter would normally make as a target moved away.[367]

Oswald's Marine scores. Oswald had standard Marine training. In December 1956 he scored 212, two points above the minimum for "sharpshooter." In May 1959 he scored 191, one point above the minimum for "marksman." A Marine records official described a sharpshooter rating as "a fairly good shot" and a low marksman rating as "a rather poor shot."[368]

A Marine marksmanship officer, Major Eugene D. Anderson, offered reasons the second score was lower: the first came right after intensive training with a coach, while conditions for the second were unknown. He concluded that compared with a civilian without that training, Oswald "would be considered as a good to excellent shot."[369]

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[364] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 195, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[365] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 11, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[366] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 189-190, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[367] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 189, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[368] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 191, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[369] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 191-192, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Practice after the Marines. The Commission found that Oswald hunted with .22 caliber rifles before and after his time in the Soviet Union. Marina Oswald testified that she saw him take the rifle out to practice, and that in New Orleans he sat on the porch at night "sighting with the telescopic lens and operating the bolt." The Commission also said the cartridge cases found at the window had been loaded and ejected from the rifle before, which "would indicate that Oswald practiced operating the bolt."[370]

The Army test. The Army's Ballistics Research Laboratory had three expert riflemen, rated "master" by the National Rifle Association, fire the rifle from a tower at three targets set at 175, 240 and 265 feet. Each man fired two series of three shots.[371]

Test detail	Result
Times for the first series of three shots	4.6, 6.75 and 8.25 seconds
Times for the second series	5.15, 6.45 and 7 seconds
First target	All hit it
Second target	Missed by several inches on the first four attempts
Third target	Five of six shots hit
Practice with the rifle beforehand	Only working the bolt for 2 or 3 minutes; they did not pull the trigger for fear of breaking the firing pin

Table source: Warren Commission report, page 193. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[372]

The Commission said the hardest task it could have required was three shots with two hits in 4.8 to 5.6 seconds, and that one of the riflemen did exactly that, hitting the target twice in each of his two series, which took 4.6 and 5.15 seconds.[373]

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[370] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 192-193, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[371] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 193, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[372] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 193, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[373] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 194, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The FBI speed test. Three FBI experts fired the rifle only to see how fast it could be worked. At 15 yards, each man's shots landed "within the size of a dime." Agent Robert Frazier later fired four groups of three shots at 100 yards in 5.6 to 6.5 seconds, with each group landing within 3 to 5 inches.[374]

The sight. The FBI found the shots landed a few inches high and to the right because of a defect in the scope. Frazier testified that a person familiar with the rifle could make up for it, and that the defect would actually help someone aiming at a target moving away.[375]

What should you make of this? Two things can both be true. The tests show the shots were possible with this rifle in the time available. They do not, by themselves, prove Oswald made them. That proof comes from the physical evidence covered in Chapter 8. Critics also point out that the test riflemen were firing from a tower at fixed targets, not at a moving car. The Marine expert Sergeant Zahm answered that point in his testimony: with the car moving directly away, downhill, from a shooter above it, he said it "made an almost stationary target while he was aiming in."[376]

The HSCA's timeline

The HSCA changed the timeline in two important ways.

First, it moved the first hit earlier. The HSCA's photographic panel studied the Zapruder film and concluded that the President and Governor Connally were struck by one bullet "at approximately Zapruder frame 190," and the President was struck in the head at frame 312.[377]

Second, it added a fourth shot from the grassy knoll, based on acoustics. The HSCA's acoustics experts analyzed a police radio recording and found four impulse patterns that they matched to gunfire. Chapter 14 covers that evidence and why it was later disputed. Here is the sequence the HSCA adopted:

Impulse	Clock time	Zapruder frame	Source according to the HSCA
I	12:30:47.0	157-161	Depository

[374] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 194, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[375] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 194, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[376] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 191, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[377] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 47, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Impulse	Clock time	Zapruder frame	Source according to the HSCA
II	12:30:48.6	188-191	Depository
III	12:30:54.6	295-296	Grassy knoll
IV	12:30:55.3	312	Depository

Table source: HSCA report, page 80. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[378]

Under this sequence, the HSCA found that "Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots at President John F. Kennedy. The second and third shots he fired struck the President. The third shot he fired killed the President."[379] The grassy knoll shot, in the HSCA's view, missed.[380]

The 1.66-second problem

The HSCA's own timeline created a problem. The first two impulses were only 1.66 seconds apart. That is faster than the FBI's 2.3-second minimum. The committee said so directly: "1.66 seconds is too brief a period for both shots to have been fired from Oswald's rifle, given the results of tests performed for the Warren Commission."[381]

The committee's answer was that the FBI had tested the rifle using the telescopic sight. The HSCA's firearms panel said that, given the angle and distance, it would have been easier to use the rifle's open iron sights. The committee test-fired a Mannlicher-Carcano with iron sights and "found that it was possible for two shots to be fired within 1.66 seconds."[382] It also pointed out that all three cartridge cases and both bullets that were found came from Oswald's rifle.[383]

Not every committee member accepted this. Representative Christopher J. Dodd voted against the committee's first finding. He wrote that the FBI test showed the rifle "could not be aimed and fired using the telescopic sights in less than 2.25-2.3 seconds," and that a

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[378] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 80, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[379] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[380] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 80, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[381] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 83, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[382] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 83, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[383] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 83, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

preliminary staff test with iron sights found "the fastest that the rifle could be fired was somewhere between 1.65 and 1.75 seconds." He concluded, "I could not conclude that Oswald fired both the first and second shots." He noted that a planned final test was never done before the vote.[384]

Why this matters

Look at what happened here. The Warren Commission said three shots, probably over more than 7 seconds, with one miss. The HSCA said four shots in about 8 seconds, three from Oswald and one from the knoll, with the first two from Oswald only 1.66 seconds apart.

Both timelines agree that Oswald fired the shots that hit the President. They disagree about the number of shots and the spacing. The HSCA's timing depends on its acoustics evidence. If that evidence is wrong, as a 1982 National Academy of Sciences review is widely reported to have concluded (Chapter 14), then the 1.66-second problem disappears along with the fourth shot.

Here is a question for you. If one key piece of evidence creates both the strongest case for a second gunman and the strongest case against a single shooter's timing, how much weight should it carry?

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Three cartridge cases from Oswald's rifle were found by the window. FBI tests with the scope showed about 2.25 to 2.3 seconds were needed between aimed shots. A bystander was struck by debris from a mark on the Main Street curb.[385]
- **Interpretation:** The Warren Commission concluded three shots over roughly 4.8 to more than 7 seconds, with the missed shot unidentified. The HSCA concluded four shots, three from Oswald and one from the knoll, based on acoustics.[386]

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[384] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 483, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[385] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 8, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 116, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[386] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 117, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 80, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- **Unknown:** Which shot missed. The Warren Commission said the evidence was inconclusive, and later work has not settled it.[387]

[387] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 111, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 10: The Single Bullet Finding

Critics call it "the magic bullet." The Warren Commission never used that phrase. Its claim was narrower: that one bullet probably passed through President Kennedy's neck and then caused all of Governor Connally's wounds. This chapter explains what the claim actually is, why the Commission made it, why it is disputed, and what the HSCA found when it tested it again.

What the claim says

According to the Warren Commission, one bullet entered the back of the President's neck, exited the front of his throat, and then struck Governor Connally, who was sitting on the jump seat in front of him. That bullet entered the right side of the Governor's back, went through his chest and exited below his right nipple, passed through his right wrist, and caused a shallow wound in his left thigh.[388]

The bullet later found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, known as Commission Exhibit 399 or CE 399, is said to be that bullet.

Why the Commission needed it, and why it said it did not

The single bullet idea grew out of a timing problem. In the Zapruder film, the President appears to react to being hit and the Governor appears to react a short time later. The Commission's tests showed the rifle needed at least 2.3 seconds between shots. If the gap between the two men's reactions was shorter than that, one rifle could not have fired two separate bullets to cause them. The HSCA described the original reasoning: the time between the observable reactions "was too short to have allowed, according to the Commission's test firings, two shots to have been fired from the same rifle."[389]

There is an awkward point here. The Commission also said that "it is not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission to determine just which shot hit Governor Connally."[390] In other words, it said all the shots came from the sixth-floor window no matter which bullet hit the Governor.

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[388] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 18-19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[389] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[390] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

So why does it matter? Because if the single bullet finding is wrong, and the reactions were too close together for one rifle, then a second shooter becomes more likely. That is why critics focus on it.

The evidence the Commission relied on

The Commission listed several kinds of support:

- **Position in the car.** Photographs showed the Governor sat directly in front of the President and somewhat to his left. The President wore a back brace that kept him upright, and the Governor sat erect in the cramped jump seat.[391]
- **A reenactment.** In a reenactment using stand-ins, an FBI expert testified that the Governor was in position to receive a bullet causing his actual wounds during Zapruder frames 207 to 225.[392]
- **Wound ballistics tests.** Army experts fired the rifle into animal tissue covered with cloth to simulate the Governor's chest wound. Two experts concluded the same bullet probably passed through the President's neck and then caused all of the Governor's wounds. One of them, Dr. Arthur J. Dziemian, testified, "I think the probability is very good that it is, that all the wounds were caused by one bullet."[393]
- **The wrist wound.** The experts thought the Governor's wrist would have been more badly damaged if a bullet had struck it after passing only through his chest. Their reading was that the bullet had already slowed and begun to tumble, which fit a bullet that had first passed through the President.[394]

Why it was disputed from the start

The strongest objection came from Governor Connally himself. He was sure he was hit by a separate shot. He testified that he heard the first shot, turned, and then felt himself hit, and

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[391] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 105, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[392] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 106, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[393] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 109, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[394] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 109, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

that he did not hear the shot that hit him.[395] After viewing the Zapruder film, he testified that he was hit between frames 231 and 234.[396]

The Commission recorded that disagreement in its own summary. It said there was "very persuasive evidence from the experts" for the single bullet, but that "Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some difference of opinion as to this probability."[397]

There was also a question about the stretcher. The hospital's senior engineer, Darrell Tomlinson, found the bullet after he bumped a stretcher against a wall, but he "was not certain whether the bullet came from the Connally stretcher or the adjacent one." The Commission concluded it came from the Governor's stretcher, in part because the President's stretcher was ruled out.[398]

The "pristine bullet" objection

The best-known objection is about the bullet's condition. Critics call CE 399 "pristine" because it was only slightly damaged. How, they ask, could a bullet break a man's rib and wrist bone and come out nearly whole?

The HSCA addressed this directly. It noted that "Numerous critics have alleged that this bullet, labeled 'pristine' because it appeared to have been only slightly damaged, could not have caused the injuries to both the Governor (particularly his shattered wrist) and the President," and that some suggested it was planted.[399]

The committee's wound ballistics expert concluded that CE 399 "is of a type that could have caused the wounds to President Kennedy and Governor Connally without showing any more deformity than it does." The committee explained that it was "a relatively long, stable, fully jacketed bullet, typical of ammunition often used by the military," and that such bullets pass through tissue more easily than soft-nosed hunting bullets.[400]

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[395] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[396] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 106, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[397] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[398] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 81, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[399] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[400] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

It is worth correcting one common description. The bullet was not undamaged. The critics' word "pristine" means only slightly damaged, and the HSCA used it in that sense.

The HSCA's tests

The HSCA brought in several separate expert panels. Their results on this question lined up.

The forensic pathology panel. The nine-member panel concluded that the Governor's wounds were all caused by a single bullet from the rear, and that the nature of the two men's wounds "was consistent with the possibility that one bullet entered the upper right back of President Kennedy and, after emerging from the front of the neck, caused all of the Governor's wounds."[401] One factor "that influenced the panel significantly" was the oval shape of the Governor's back wound, which suggested the bullet had begun to tumble before it hit him, as a bullet does after passing through something else.[402] The panel's conclusions were "consistent with the so-called single bullet theory."[403]

On most questions, that panel voted 8 to 1. The one consistent dissenter was Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, the coroner of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.[404] His dissent is part of the record and should not be ignored.

The photographic panel. It found that the President appeared to be reacting to a hit by about frame 200, and the Governor by about frames 222 to 226. It suggested the Governor reacted "approximately one second after President Kennedy," and found that the two men's alignment just before they disappeared behind a road sign "was consistent with the single bullet theory."[405]

Neutron activation analysis. This chemical test compares trace elements in bullet fragments. The HSCA's consultant concluded it was "highly likely" that CE 399 and the fragments removed from the Governor's wrist came from the same bullet. The test also found evidence of only two bullets among the fragments large enough to test.[406]

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[401] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[402] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[403] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[404] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[405] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 46, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[406] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Trajectory. The committee's trajectory analysis traced the bullet paths back to the area of the Depository's southeast corner window.[407]

The caveat on bullet-lead analysis

I need to flag one limit on that chemical evidence. I am aware that, in the years after the HSCA, some scientists questioned how reliable this kind of bullet-lead comparison is. I was not able to open those later studies or any official review of them while researching this edition, so I cannot describe what they found or cite them. That point is **[Not verified]**. The HSCA's finding stands as the committee's conclusion as of 1979.

Where this leaves us

Question	Warren Commission (1964)	HSCA (1979)
Did one bullet probably hit both men?	Yes, "very persuasive evidence," with some difference of opinion	Yes, consistent with all its expert panels, with one panel member dissenting
Is CE 399's condition consistent with that path?	Yes, per Army wound ballistics experts	Yes, per its wound ballistics expert
Did the Governor agree?	No; he believed he was hit by a separate shot	Not changed
When were the men hit?	President between frames 210 and 225	Both at about frame 190, the Governor reacting about one second later

Table sources: Warren Commission report, pages 19 and 105-109; HSCA report, pages 43-47. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[408]

On this question, the two main official investigations reached the same conclusion fifteen years apart, using different experts and some different methods. The strongest evidence against it is the Governor's own sense of when he was hit, and that kind of memory is known to be unreliable in sudden, violent events. That is my interpretation, and you are free to weigh the Governor's account more heavily.

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[407] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 48, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[408] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 105-109, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 43-47, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** CE 399 was found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital and was fired from Oswald's rifle. It was only slightly damaged. Governor Connally believed he was hit by a separate shot.[409]
- **Interpretation:** Both the Warren Commission and the HSCA concluded that one bullet probably caused the President's neck wound and all of the Governor's wounds. One HSCA panel member, Dr. Cyril Wecht, consistently dissented.[410]
- **Unknown:** Whether later criticism of bullet-lead chemical analysis weakens the HSCA's "highly likely" finding on CE 399. I could not verify that literature for this edition.

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[409] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 81, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[410] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 43-45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 11: The Zapruder Film and the Medical Evidence

Two kinds of evidence have done more than anything else to keep people doubting the official account. One is a home movie that seems to show the President's head moving backward when the fatal shot hits. The other is an autopsy record that even friendly reviewers have called incomplete. This chapter covers both. In keeping with this book's approach, I do not reproduce any film frames or autopsy images, and I describe the wounds only as far as needed to follow the arguments.

The film

Abraham Zapruder was a Dallas clothing manufacturer who filmed the motorcade with a home movie camera from a concrete pedestal on the north side of Elm Street. The Warren Commission described him as "an amateur photographer" and used his film to time the shots and compute the car's speed, based on a camera speed of 18.3 frames per second.[411] The HSCA called it "the only continuous chronological visual record of the assassination."[412]

What happened to the original

The ownership of the film has its own history, and it is often confused.

- In 1978, Zapruder's son, Henry G. Zapruder, deposited the original film with the National Archives for safekeeping. The family kept legal ownership.[413]
- In 1993 and 1994, after the Records Act passed, the family tried to get the original back. The Archives declined.[414]
- In April 1997, the Assassination Records Review Board held a public hearing and then resolved that the film was an assassination record that should belong to the public. The government's acquisition was treated as a "taking" under the Fifth Amendment, which requires fair payment.[415]

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[411] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[412] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[413] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[414] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[415] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- On August 3, 1999, the Justice Department announced that an arbitration panel had awarded the Zapruder heirs $16 million. The family had sought $30 million. Government experts had valued the film at $784,000 to $1 million. The panel voted 2 to 1, and the dissenting member called the award "simply too large an amount in light of the evidence in the record." The family kept the copyright.[416]
- In January 2000, a news report said the family donated the copyright and its last original-generation copy of the film to the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas.[417]

So the original film is in the National Archives and belongs to the public. The copyright is a separate matter.

The head movement

In the film, at the moment of the fatal shot, the President's head moves backward and to the left. Many people who see this conclude that the shot came from the front, from the grassy knoll. The HSCA acknowledged the problem: the backward motion "suggest[ed] to critics of the Warren Commission's findings that the President was struck by a bullet that entered the front of the head."[418]

The HSCA asked a wound ballistics expert to study whether the direction of a head movement tells you the direction of a shot. The expert concluded that nerve damage from a bullet entering the head could cause the President's back muscles to tighten, which could move the head backward. He demonstrated the effect in a filmed experiment. The committee concluded that "the rearward movement of the President's head would not be fundamentally inconsistent with a bullet striking from the rear."[419]

That is an interpretation, supported by an expert test. Not everyone accepts it. But the HSCA's medical evidence, covered next, is what the committee relied on most.

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[416] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Panel Issues Decision on Compensation for Zapruder Film," press release 99-339, August 3, 1999, https://www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/1999/August/339civ.htm, accessed November 12, 2026.

[417] "Zapruders Donate JFK Film Rights," News On 6 (Tulsa, Oklahoma), January 26, 2000, https://www.newson6.com/story/5e3686102f69d76f6209ba4f/zapruders-donate-jfk-film-rights, accessed November 12, 2026.

[418] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[419] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 43-44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The autopsy and its problems

The autopsy was done on the night of November 22 at the Naval hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, by military doctors.[420] The Assassination Records Review Board, which did not try to solve the case, nonetheless listed serious problems with the autopsy record:

- There was confusion about whether the lead autopsy doctor, Dr. James J. Humes, destroyed the original draft of the autopsy report or his notes.
- Measurements "were frequently imprecise and sometimes inexplicably absent."
- The Warren Commission did not show the autopsy doctors the original autopsy photographs, nor ask enough detailed questions about them.
- No complete, contemporaneous count of the photographs was made, and a proper chain of custody was not established for all the materials.
- When shown copies of the photographs by the HSCA, Dr. Humes made statements that seemed to revise his opinion on where the head wound entered.

Source for the list: ARRB Final Report, chapter 6, part II.[421]

In a deposition for the Review Board, Dr. Humes "acknowledged under questioning--in testimony that appears to differ from what he told the Warren Commission--that he had destroyed both his notes taken at the autopsy and the first draft of the autopsy report."[422]

The Review Board also found a new witness, Saundra Spencer, who had worked at the Naval Photographic Center in 1963. She testified under oath that she developed post-mortem photographs of the President in November 1963 and that "these photographs were different from those in the National Archives since 1966."[423]

The Board's overall comment is worth quoting: "One of the many tragedies related to the assassination of President Kennedy has been the incompleteness of the autopsy record and the suspicion caused by the shroud of secrecy that has surrounded the records that do exist."[424]

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[420] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[421] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[422] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[423] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[424] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

What the Review Board's medical work added

The Review Board was not required to take testimony, but it did. It found nearly all the living people who had created the autopsy records and brought them to the National Archives. For the first time, they were questioned in the presence of the original color transparencies.[425]

Several results are worth knowing, because they cut in different directions:

- **The photographer's doubts.** The autopsy photographer, John Stringer, explained his procedures and "raised some questions about whether the supplemental brain photographs that he took are those that are now in NARA."[426]
- **An assistant who changed his mind.** Stringer's former assistant, Floyd Riebe, had told researchers that the autopsy photographs were altered. He had based that on copies circulating in public. When shown the actual photographs at the Archives, he "re-evaluated his earlier opinion."[427]
- **A clearer picture of the wounds.** Dr. J. Thornton Boswell, another autopsy doctor, marked his best recollection of the head wounds on a plastic skull, to help clear up the imprecise measurements.[428]
- **Photographs no one knew existed.** The Board found additional latent images on a roll of film that had been described as showing "no recognizable image." Kodak digitized and enhanced them.[429]
- **A cold trail.** The President's personal physician, Admiral George Burkley, was the only doctor present both at Parkland and at the autopsy. In the late 1970s he suggested through his lawyer that he might have more information. By the 1990s both men had died, and Burkley's family declined to waive attorney-client privilege so the Board could see the lawyer's files.[430]

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[425] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[426] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[427] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[428] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[429] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[430] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- **Faded memories.** A Secret Service official who was a key link in the chain of custody of the autopsy materials was, when interviewed, "quite elderly and little able to remember the important details."[431]

The Board also arranged for the autopsy photographs to be digitized on a high-end scanner in Rochester, New York, with help from Kodak, the National Archives, the FBI and a representative of the Kennedy family. It said the digitizing "should also provide assistance for those who wish to pursue the question of whether the autopsy photographs were altered."[432]

One fact limits what the public can do with any of this. The autopsy photographs and X-rays are exempt from public release under the JFK Act, and access to them, including the digitized copies, is controlled by a representative of the Kennedy family.[433] That is one reason this book, like the Board, does not reproduce them.

The Board's own advice on all of this testimony is worth repeating: "It would be more prudent to weigh all of the evidence, with due concern for human error, rather than take single statements as 'proof' for one theory or another."[434]

The Warren Commission did not look at the photos

The HSCA reported a striking fact: "neither the members of the Warren Commission, nor its staff, nor the doctors who had performed the autopsy, took advantage of the X-rays and photographs of the President that were taken during the course of the autopsy." The reason was that the Commission had committed to publishing all the evidence it examined, and it did not want to publish the autopsy images out of respect for the Kennedy family's privacy.[435]

The HSCA said the secrecy around the autopsy "has led to considerable skepticism toward the Commission's findings."[436]

Later medical reviews

Three later government reviews looked at the autopsy X-rays and photographs:

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[431] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[432] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[433] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[434] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[435] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[436] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Review	Year	Conclusion on the wounds
Panel appointed by Attorney General Ramsey Clark	1968	Two bullets, both from behind
Panel for the Rockefeller Commission	1975	Two bullets, both from behind
HSCA forensic pathology panel	1978-1979	Two bullets, both from behind; no medical evidence of a shot from the front

Table source: HSCA report, pages 41-43. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[437]

The HSCA noted that neither the 1968 nor the 1975 panel published the images or explained its reasoning in a public hearing, so neither was able "to relieve significantly doubts that have persisted."[438]

Were the photos and X-rays genuine?

The HSCA went a step further than the earlier panels. It asked whether the autopsy photographs and X-rays were really of President Kennedy, and whether any had been altered.

- Forensic anthropologists compared the autopsy photographs with photographs taken of the President in life and found they matched.[439]
- They compared the autopsy X-rays with X-rays taken before his death, and a forensic dentist compared dental X-rays with his dental records. Both concluded the X-rays were of President Kennedy.[440]
- Photographic scientists and radiologists examined the original photographs, negatives, transparencies and X-rays and "concluded there was no evidence of the photographic or radiographic materials having been altered."[441]

With that settled, the HSCA's nine-member forensic pathology panel, eight of whom were chief medical examiners of major U.S. jurisdictions, examined the materials.[442] It concluded

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[437] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 41-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[438] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[439] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 42-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[440] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[441] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

"that President Kennedy was struck by two, and only two, bullets, each of which entered from the rear." One entered the upper right back and exited the throat. The other entered the right rear of the head and exited the right side. It added: "There is no medical evidence that the President was struck by a bullet entering the front of the head, and the possibility that a bullet could have struck the President and yet left no evidence is extremely remote."[443]

Remember the 8 to 1 voting pattern. Dr. Cyril Wecht was the consistent dissenter on that panel.[444]

The Parkland doctors

Some of the strongest doubts come from the doctors in Dallas, who saw the President before the autopsy. The Warren Commission reported that Dr. William Kemp Clark, who most closely observed the head wound, "described a large, gaping wound in the right rear part of the head." Dr. Clark said the small bullet hole in the back of the head found at the autopsy "could have easily been hidden in the blood and hair."[445]

Critics read the Dallas doctors' descriptions as evidence of an exit wound in the back of the head, which would mean a shot from the front. The HSCA's panel, working from the photographs and X-rays it had authenticated, concluded otherwise.

The Review Board took a joint deposition of five of the Parkland doctors near the end of its work.[446] It warned readers to treat all such testimony with caution: "Often the witnesses contradict not only each other, but sometimes themselves. For events that transpired almost 35 years ago, all persons are likely to have failures of memory." It gave an example: one Parkland doctor recalled seeing Mrs. Kennedy in a white dress, when she was wearing a pink suit.[447]

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[442] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[443] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[444] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[445] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 54-55, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[446] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[447] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Putting the two together

The film evidence and the medical evidence pull in what looks like opposite directions. To most viewers, the film suggests a shot from the front. The authenticated autopsy materials, as read by the HSCA's panel, show two shots from behind.

Which should carry more weight? The HSCA chose the medical evidence, examined by experts and checked for alteration, over a visual impression from the film, and it offered a physical explanation for the head movement. That is the committee's judgment. A reader who distrusts the chain of custody for the autopsy materials, which the Review Board said was not properly kept, may weigh things differently.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The Warren Commission did not examine the autopsy photos and X-rays. The lead autopsy doctor destroyed his notes and a first draft of the report. The government acquired the original Zapruder film, and the heirs were awarded $16 million in 1999.[448]
- **Interpretation:** Three later expert panels concluded that two bullets struck the President from behind. The HSCA found no evidence that the autopsy images were altered and concluded that the backward head movement is consistent with a shot from the rear.[449]
- **Unknown:** Why the record of the autopsy photographs is incomplete, and what accounts for the differences in recollection among the Dallas and Bethesda witnesses. The Review Board described these problems but could not resolve them.[450]

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[448] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Panel Issues Decision on Compensation for Zapruder Film," press release 99-339, August 3, 1999, https://www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/1999/August/339civ.htm, accessed November 12, 2026.

[449] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 41-44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[450] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Five: The Later Investigations

The Warren Commission was not the last word. Over the next fifteen years, a local prosecutor, a presidential commission and two congressional committees all took another look. Part Five covers what each of them did and what each of them found. They did not all ask the same question, and that matters when you compare their answers.

Chapter 12: Garrison, Rockefeller and Church

Doubt builds in the 1960s

The Review Board's final report gives a useful summary of how public doubt grew after 1964. It says the Commission's reliance on the FBI and its failure to examine the autopsy photographs and X-rays gave critics their first openings.[451] It also notes that once more Warren Commission records were opened at the National Archives in the mid-1960s, critics such as Mark Lane and Edward Epstein began publishing books that questioned the Commission's conclusions.[452]

The Review Board quoted two very different descriptions of the Warren Commission's work. Gerald Ford, a Commission member, said its record would "stand like a Gibraltar of factual literature through the ages to come." Three decades later, an author compared the Commission's work to "a dead whale decomposing on a beach." The Board's comment was that "neither is fully accurate."[453]

Jim Garrison and the trial of Clay Shaw

In 1967, Jim Garrison, the District Attorney of New Orleans, announced his own investigation of the assassination. He charged Clay L. Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, with conspiracy to murder the President.[454]

Here is what the official record says about how it turned out:

- David W. Ferrie, an anti-Castro activist and the other suspect Garrison named, died within days of being named.[455]
- Clay Shaw was tried and acquitted in 1969.[456]
- Shaw was the only person ever tried for the murder of President Kennedy.[457]

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[451] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[452] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[453] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[454] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[455] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[456] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The Review Board described Garrison as "Flamboyant and articulate" and "a media sensation," and said his investigation "popularized a radical critique of the official version of the assassination." It also noted that the Shaw trial was the first time the Zapruder film was shown in public.[458]

The HSCA later looked at some of the leads Garrison had raised, especially the witnesses who said they saw Oswald in Clinton, Louisiana, in the late summer of 1963. The committee said it was "Aware that Garrison had been fairly criticized for questionable tactics," so it checked the information itself rather than relying on Garrison's work. It found the Clinton witnesses credible. Some of them said Oswald was with two older men they identified as Ferrie and Shaw. The committee said that if the witnesses were accurate, they established "an association of an undetermined nature" among the three men.[459]

Notice what that does and does not say. The HSCA did not say Shaw was part of a plot. It said that a possible association existed and that its nature was undetermined. A jury had already acquitted Shaw.

What happened to Garrison's records

Garrison's files ended up in the public record, though not easily. During the 1990s, the Review Board obtained:

- About 15,000 pages of Garrison's assassination papers, donated by his family.[460]
- Grand jury transcripts from Garrison's investigation. A former investigator had kept them at his home; after a Review Board hearing in New Orleans in 1995, he sent them to the Board.[461]
- The District Attorney's investigative files. The New Orleans District Attorney at the time, Harry Connick Sr., resisted. After "A flurry of subpoenas" and a lawsuit Connick lost, both the files and the grand jury transcripts went into the JFK Collection.[462]

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[457] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[458] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[459] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 142-143, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[460] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 7, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[461] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 7, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[462] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 7, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- Clay Shaw's own papers, including his diary from the time of the trial.[463]

Anyone can now compare Garrison's case with Shaw's defense files in the same collection.

The Clark Panel, 1968

In 1968, Attorney General Ramsey Clark appointed a team of forensic pathologists to review the autopsy photographs and X-rays. Chapter 11 covered its result: two bullets, both from behind. The HSCA noted that the panel did not test whether the photographs and X-rays were authentic.[464]

The Rockefeller Commission, 1975

President Gerald Ford established the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States, usually called the Rockefeller Commission. As its name says, its main job was CIA activity inside the country, not the assassination. But as part of its work it did a forensic review of the assassination, including a medical panel.[465] That panel reached the same conclusion as the Clark Panel: two bullets, both from behind. Like the Clark Panel, it did not test whether the photographs and X-rays were authentic.[466]

[Not verified] I did not open the Rockefeller Commission's own report while researching this book. Everything said here about it comes from how the HSCA and the Review Board describe it.

The Review Board noted that the Rockefeller Commission viewed the Zapruder film in February 1975. Shortly after, a television program called *Goodnight America* showed the film on national television. In the Board's words, "When the American public saw the film, many concluded that President Kennedy's fatal head wound had been caused by a shot from the front."[467]

That broadcast is a turning point. For eleven years, most Americans had only read about the film. Now they could see it, and the head movement covered in Chapter 11 became something everyone could judge for themselves.

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[463] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 7, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[464] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[465] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[466] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[467] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

The Church Committee, 1975 and 1976

At the same time, a Senate committee chaired by Senator Frank Church of Idaho was investigating the intelligence agencies. Its formal name was the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. It became known as the Church Committee.[468]

The Church Committee had uncovered U.S. government plots to kill foreign leaders, including Fidel Castro.[469] That raised an obvious question: did the agencies tell the Warren Commission about those plots, and did the plots have anything to do with Dallas? The committee answered those questions in Book V of its final report, dated April 1976 and released in June 1976.[470]

What the Church Committee looked at, and what it did not

This point is easy to miss. The Church Committee did not reinvestigate the shooting. It said plainly:

> "It did not review the findings and conclusions of the Warren Commission. It did not re-examine the physical evidence which the Warren Commission had. It did not review one of the principal questions facing the Commission: whether Lee Harvey Oswald was in fact the assassin of President Kennedy."[471]

Instead, it looked at how the FBI and CIA investigated the assassination and how they dealt with the Warren Commission. It interviewed or deposed more than 50 witnesses and acquired more than 5,000 pages of documents.[472]

What it found

The Church Committee's findings were sharp. A few of its key statements:

- "both the CIA and the FBI failed in, or avoided carrying out, certain of their responsibilities in this matter."[473]

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[468] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 2, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[469] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[470] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 6, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[471] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 6, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[472] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 6, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[473] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 7, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

- "Neither the CIA nor the FBI told the Warren Commission about the CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro."[474]
- Seventeen FBI employees, including one Assistant Director, were disciplined over the handling of the Oswald case, and that fact "was never publicly disclosed by the Bureau or communicated to the Warren Commission."[475]
- "the possibility exists that senior officials in both agencies made conscious decisions not to disclose potentially important information."[476]

Chapter 15 goes into these findings in detail, including the CIA's AMLASH plot against Castro, which was active on the day of the assassination.[477]

What it did not find

The Church Committee was just as careful about the limits of its findings. It wrote:

> "The Committee emphasizes that it has not uncovered any evidence sufficient to justify a conclusion that there was a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy."[478]

It also said that its discussion of the agencies' failures "does not lead to the conclusion that there was a conspiracy," and that it had "seen no evidence that Fidel Castro or others in the Cuban government plotted President Kennedy's assassination in retaliation for U.S. operations against Cuba."[479]

Because the committee's term ended on May 31, 1976, it said "a final resolution of these questions was impossible," and it recommended that the Senate's permanent intelligence committee continue the work.[480]

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[474] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[475] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[476] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[477] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 8-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[478] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 11, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[479] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 7, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[480] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 7, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Why these three matter

Body	Years	Question it asked	Main finding on the assassination
Garrison investigation (New Orleans)	1967-1969	Did Clay Shaw conspire to kill the President?	Shaw acquitted by a jury in 1969
Clark Panel	1968	What do the autopsy photos and X-rays show?	Two bullets, both from behind
Rockefeller Commission medical panel	1975	Same question	Two bullets, both from behind
Church Committee (Senate)	1975-1976	Did the FBI and CIA investigate properly and tell the Warren Commission everything?	No; important information was withheld. No evidence sufficient to conclude there was a conspiracy

Table sources: HSCA report, pages 42 and 142; Church Committee Book V, PDF pages 6-12; ARRB Final Report, chapter 1. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[481]

Put yourself in the place of an American in 1976. You have just seen the Zapruder film for the first time. You have just learned that the CIA plotted to kill Castro and never told the Warren Commission. Would you trust the 1964 report? The Review Board wrote that by the time the HSCA began work in September 1976, skepticism "had hardened in the minds of millions of Americans."[482] The House of Representatives responded by creating the HSCA, which is the subject of the next chapter.[483]

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[481] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 6-12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[482] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[483] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Clay Shaw was acquitted in 1969. The Clark Panel and the Rockefeller Commission's medical panel both found two bullets from behind. The Church Committee found that the CIA and FBI withheld information about the Castro plots from the Warren Commission.[484]
- **Interpretation:** The Review Board judged that Garrison's case "popularized a radical critique" of the official account, and that the 1975 broadcast of the Zapruder film led many people to believe the fatal shot came from the front.[485] The HSCA judged that the Clinton witnesses were credible but that the nature of any Oswald, Ferrie and Shaw association was undetermined.[486]
- **Unknown:** Why senior FBI and CIA officials withheld what they knew. The Church Committee said it was "still unclear" and could not resolve it before its term ended.[487]

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[484] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 9-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[485] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[486] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 142-143, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[487] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 13: The House Select Committee on Assassinations, 1976 to 1979

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, or HSCA, is the only official body that concluded President Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy." That one phrase is quoted constantly. The reasoning behind it, and the limits the committee put on it, are quoted much less often. This chapter covers both.

How the committee was created

The House created the committee in September 1976 with House Resolution 1540. It had 12 members and was told to investigate the deaths of both President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The HSCA itself said that "Substantial impetus" for the committee came from the Church Committee's report, which had revealed that the CIA withheld the Castro plots from the Warren Commission.[488]

The committee's first months were rocky. Its first resolution expired when the 94th Congress ended on January 3, 1977, and the House had to reconstitute it. That was controversial, partly because of cost, and the House first extended it only to the end of March 1977.[489]

Representative Robert W. Edgar, a committee member, later described what happened next. The new chairman, Representative Henry Gonzalez of Texas, "immediately came into conflict" with the chief counsel, Richard Sprague. The two spent January through March 1977 struggling over budgets, and "Little time was spent in actual investigations." Gonzalez resigned the chairmanship in March 1977, and Sprague left soon after.[490]

The committee then settled down:

- On March 8, 1977, Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio became chairman.[491]
- Representative Richardson Preyer of North Carolina chaired the subcommittee on the Kennedy assassination.[492]
- On March 30, 1977, the House extended the committee to January 3, 1979.[493]

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[488] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[489] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 9-10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[490] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 494, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[491] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[492] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- In June 1977, G. Robert Blakey became chief counsel and staff director.[494]

According to Edgar, real investigation did not start until July 1977. The committee took private testimony beginning that fall and opened public hearings in August 1978.[495]

So the committee did its actual investigating in about 18 months. That is longer than the Warren Commission's ten months, but not by much.

How it worked differently from the Warren Commission

The HSCA did two things the Warren Commission did not:

- **It used its own experts.** It brought in independent panels of forensic pathologists, firearms examiners, photographic scientists, handwriting experts and acoustics experts. Earlier chapters cover their results.[496]
- **It looked at the autopsy photos and X-rays,** and had them authenticated first.[497]

It also had something the Warren Commission lacked: the Church Committee's findings about the Castro plots and the agencies' failures.[498]

What the HSCA concluded

Here are the HSCA's main findings on the Kennedy assassination, in its own words:[499]

- "Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots at President John F. Kennedy. The second and third shots he fired struck the President. The third shot he fired killed the President."
- "President Kennedy was struck by two rifle shots fired from behind him."
- "Scientific acoustical evidence establishes a high probability that two gunmen fired at President John F. Kennedy."

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[493] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[494] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 10, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[495] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 495, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[496] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 41-47, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 50-56, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[497] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 42-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[498] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[499] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- "The committee believes, on the basis of the evidence available to it, that President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy. The committee is unable to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy."

It also said, on the basis of the evidence available to it, that these were **not** involved:[500]

Group	HSCA finding
Soviet government	Not involved
Cuban government	Not involved
Anti-Castro Cuban groups, as groups	Not involved, but individual members not ruled out
Organized crime, as a group	Not involved, but individual members not ruled out
Secret Service, FBI and CIA	Not involved

Table source: HSCA report, summary of findings. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[501]

What "conspiracy" meant to the committee

This is the part people skip. The HSCA defined conspiracy in a narrow, legal way. If two or more people agreed to kill the President, and at least one acted on the plan, that was a conspiracy. The committee said a conspiracy "might be a complex plot orchestrated by foreign political powers" or "it also might be the plan of two largely isolated individuals with no readily discernible motive."[502]

The committee listed four reasons for its finding:[503]

1. The Warren Commission's and FBI's investigation of conspiracy "was seriously flawed," so their failure to find one could not be given independent weight.
2. The Warren Commission was wrong that Oswald and Ruby had no significant associations.
3. A limited conspiracy could not be ruled out, even though the major groups were not involved as groups.

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[500] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[501] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[502] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 95, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[503] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 97, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

4. "There was a high probability that a second gunman, in fact, fired at the President."

Look closely at that list. Reasons 1 to 3 say that a conspiracy could not be ruled out. Only reason 4, the second gunman, is positive evidence that one existed. And the second gunman finding rested on the acoustics evidence. The committee itself wrote that "The photographic and other scientific evidence available to the committee was insufficient" to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy.[504]

The committee also said it was "possible" the conspiracy involved only Oswald and a second gunman, but that it could not conclude that because "it would have been based on speculation, not evidence."[505]

The members who disagreed

The committee was not unanimous. Its report includes separate views and dissents from members.[506]

- **Representative Christopher J. Dodd** voted against the first finding. As Chapter 9 explained, he was not convinced Oswald could have fired the first two shots 1.66 seconds apart.[507]
- **Representatives Samuel L. Devine and Robert W. Edgar** wrote joint views. They praised the staff but said a "premature leak of technical evidence from acoustics experts was overemphasized in the national media." They added that the acoustics testimony "was given such weight that most committee members were persuaded that a fourth shot was fired at Kennedy."[508]
- **Representative Edgar** also wrote his own statement. He said the acoustics experts' final report reached the committee only on December 18, 1978, and the committee adopted its findings eleven days later. He wrote, "I believe we rushed to our conclusions and in doing so, overshadowed many important contributions which other aspects of our investigation will have on history."[509]

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[504] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 97-98, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[505] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 98, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[506] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 483, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[507] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 483, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[508] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 491, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[509] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 498, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- **Representative Harold S. Sawyer** filed a dissent disagreeing with several specific findings, including parts of the conspiracy finding.[510]

Those dissents matter for the next chapter. The finding that grabbed the headlines, a probable conspiracy, rested heavily on the evidence the dissenting members trusted least.

What the HSCA said about the agencies

The committee's headline findings were about who fired and whether there was a conspiracy. But it also graded the agencies that protected the President and investigated his death. Its overall verdict was that they "performed with varying degrees of competency in the fulfillment of their duties."[511]

Here is how it graded each one, in its own words:[512]

Agency or body	What the HSCA found
Secret Service	"deficient in the performance of its duties"; it had information that was "not properly analyzed, investigated or used," and agents in the motorcade "were inadequately prepared to protect the President from a sniper"
Justice Department	"failed to exercise initiative in supervising and directing the investigation" by the FBI
FBI, before the assassination	"adequately investigated Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination"
FBI, after the assassination	conducted "a thorough and professional investigation" into Oswald's responsibility, but "failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy" and was "deficient in its sharing of information with other agencies and departments"
CIA	"deficient in its collection and sharing of information both prior to and subsequent to

[510] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 503, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[511] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 2-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[512] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 2-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Agency or body	What the HSCA found
	the assassination"
Warren Commission	conducted "a thorough and professional investigation" into Oswald's responsibility, but "failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy," partly because it did not receive all the relevant information other agencies held

Table source: HSCA report, summary of findings, pages 2-3. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[513]

Two of the committee's sentences sum up its view of the 1964 investigation. It said the conclusions "were arrived at in good faith, but presented in a fashion that was too definitive." And it said "the investigation into the possibility of conspiracy in the assassination was inadequate."[514]

Notice what this grading does and does not say. It does not say the FBI or the Warren Commission got the shooter wrong. On that question, the committee called their work thorough. Its criticism was about the conspiracy question and about information that was not shared. That is the same pattern Part Six of this book follows.

Not every member agreed with the grades. Representative Sawyer's dissent rejected the finding that the President "did not receive adequate protection," the finding that the conspiracy investigation was "inadequate," and the finding that the Secret Service "was deficient in the performance of its duties." He did agree that the CIA withheld information about the Castro plots from the Warren Commission.[515]

Which grade seems fairest to you? Is it possible for an investigation to be right about the shooter and still incomplete on everything else?

What the committee asked others to do

The HSCA did not claim to have closed the case. It recommended that:[516]

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[513] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 2-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[514] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 2-3, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[515] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 503, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[516] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 4, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- The Justice Department examine a film taken by Charles L. Bronson to see if it mattered to the case.
- A Justice Department research institute and the National Science Foundation study the use of acoustics in forensic questions, using the Kennedy case.
- The Justice Department review the committee's findings and decide whether further official investigation was warranted.

Chapter 14 covers what happened when the acoustics were reviewed.

Sealing the records

One more fact shaped everything after 1979. Under House rules, the HSCA's unpublished records were sealed for 50 years, until 2029. The Review Board noted that some former staff members claimed the report "did not reflect their investigative work."[517] Sealed records and unhappy former staff are a recipe for suspicion. That set the stage for the JFK Records Act in 1992 (Chapter 16).

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The HSCA found that Oswald fired the shots that hit the President, and that the President was probably killed as a result of a conspiracy. It could not identify any other gunman. Several members wrote separate views or dissents.[518]
- **Interpretation:** The committee's conspiracy finding depended mostly on the acoustics evidence. That is my reading of the committee's own four reasons, and it matches what Representatives Devine and Edgar wrote.[519]
- **Unknown:** Who the second gunman was, if there was one. The HSCA said it could not tell.[520]

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[517] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[518] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 483, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 491, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 503, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[519] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 97, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 491, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[520] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 97-98, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 14: The Acoustics Evidence and Its Review

Chapter 13 showed that the HSCA's conspiracy finding leaned on one piece of evidence: a police radio recording. The committee said so itself: "Scientifically, the existence of the second gunman was established only by the acoustical study."[521] This chapter explains what that recording is, what the HSCA's experts said it showed, and what later reviewers said about it.

The recording

On November 22, 1963, the Dallas police used two radio channels. Channel 1 was recorded on a Dictabelt, a kind of plastic recording belt. Channel 2 was recorded on a separate disc machine. Channel 1 recorded continuously, while channel 2 recorded only when someone spoke.[522]

During the shooting, a police motorcycle or other vehicle had its microphone switch stuck in the "on" position, so channel 1 picked up several minutes of background sound. To the human ear, the HSCA said, the recordings "contain no discernible sounds of gunfire."[523]

The Warren Commission had transcripts of the police radio traffic, but it did not have the recordings acoustically analyzed.[524] The HSCA obtained the original Dictabelts in March 1978 from a former Dallas police lieutenant who had kept them since 1969. The committee found "no evidence that any of the materials had been tampered with" while in police custody or his.[525]

The HSCA's experts

The committee hired two sets of experts:

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[521] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 84, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[522] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 66, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[523] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 67, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[524] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 66, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[525] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 67, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- **Bolt Beranek and Newman (BBN)** of Cambridge, Massachusetts, under its chief scientist, Dr. James E. Barger. The firm had analyzed the Kent State shooting recording and had served on the panel that examined the Watergate tapes.[526]
- **Professor Mark Weiss and Ernest Aschkenasy** of Queens College in New York, recommended by the Acoustical Society of America to review BBN's work.[527]

What they did

1. BBN found six sequences of sound impulses on the channel 1 recording that could have been gunfire. All six passed initial screening tests.[528]
2. On August 20, 1978, the committee fired test shots in Dealey Plaza from the Depository and from the grassy knoll, and recorded them on many microphones. The idea was that every combination of shooter, target and microphone gives a unique pattern of echoes, an "acoustical fingerprint."[529]
3. BBN compared the test patterns with the 1963 recording and found matches for four impulse patterns.[530]
4. Weiss and Aschkenasy then refined the analysis for the third impulse, the one suggesting a shot from the knoll.[531]

How sure were they?

This is where the numbers matter, so here they are side by side:

Expert	Date	Probability of a shot from the grassy knoll
Barger (BBN), testimony	September 1978	"only 50 percent"
Weiss and Aschkenasy	December 1978	"95 percent or better"
Barger, after reviewing	Late 1978	Agreed their procedures were correct; estimated a 76

[526] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 66-67, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[527] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 69, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[528] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 67-68, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[529] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 68-69, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[530] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 72, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[531] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 74, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Expert	Date	Probability of a shot from the grassy knoll
Weiss and Aschkenasy		percent chance that the impulse represented a supersonic bullet

Table source: HSCA report, pages 72-75. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[532]

Barger's lower number came from his estimate that any single match had a 50-50 chance of being caused by random noise.[533] Weiss and Aschkenasy said they could match the pattern to within one-thousandth of a second, which made a chance match unlikely.[534]

Finding the motorcycle

If the sounds came from a motorcycle microphone, the motorcycle had to be in the right place. The committee identified Officer H. B. McLain, who rode on the left side of the motorcade, as likely being near the corner of Houston and Elm at the right time.[535]

McLain's own testimony was mixed. He said his radio button "often got stuck in the 'on' position," but he did not know if it was stuck that day. He recalled hearing only one shot. He also said he may have heard Chief Curry's broadcast on channel 2, which raised the question of which channel his radio was tuned to.[536]

Did the photographs show a second gunman?

If a gunman fired from behind the stockade fence on the grassy knoll, you might expect a photograph to show him. The HSCA asked its photographic panel to look. The panel enhanced only original photographic materials, because copies distort detail.[537]

Here is what it found, photograph by photograph:

Photograph or film	What critics said it showed	What the HSCA panel found
Mary Moorman's Polaroid,	Possible shapes behind the	Enhancement near the

[532] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 72-75, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[533] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 72, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[534] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 74, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[535] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 75-76, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[536] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 76, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[537] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 84, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Photograph or film	What critics said it showed	What the HSCA panel found
taken about the moment of the head shot	fence	retaining wall showed "no evidence of any human form." The fence area was too poor in quality to enhance.
Zapruder frame 413	A "gunman in the bush" with a rifle	A person on the far side of the bush, probably a man on the sidewalk; the "rifle" was twigs and a gap in the leaves
Philip Willis photograph No. 5	A figure behind the retaining wall	A real person, about 41 feet from the spot the acoustics pointed to, with "a very distinct straight-line feature" near his hands that could not be identified
Orville Nix film	A gunman in a "classic" firing stance	"Not, in fact, a human being," based on shadow analysis

Table source: HSCA report, pages 84-86. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[538]

None of the knoll photographs showed a puff of smoke or flash of light, which several witnesses reported. The committee's summary was that the photographic evidence "did not confirm or preclude the presence of a gunman firing at the President from behind the stockade fence."[539]

The committee was honest about what that meant for the acoustics. It said that if the Moorman photograph "did not contain images that might be construed to be a figure behind the fence, it would be a troubling lack of corroboration for the acoustical analysis."[540]

The panel also looked at film of the Depository taken just before the shooting. Motion that some had seen in the sixth-floor window was judged to be a photographic artifact, not a person moving. A film by Charles Bronson reached the committee only on December 2,

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[538] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 84-86, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[539] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 86, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[540] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 85, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

1978, too late for full review, which is why the committee recommended that the Justice Department analyze it.[541]

What the witnesses heard

The HSCA also compared the acoustics with the witnesses. Of the 178 witnesses whose accounts it reviewed, 21 thought the shots came from the grassy knoll.[542] The committee concluded that the witness testimony "supported the finding of the acoustical analysis that there was a high probability that a shot was fired at the President from the grassy knoll."[543]

It also offered a caution of its own. Witnesses may have made a "forced choice" between the two locations, because police and spectators ran toward both the knoll and the Depository, and some press reports about shooter locations came out before the witnesses were interviewed.[544]

The timing problem it created

As Chapter 9 showed, the acoustics timeline put the first two shots only 1.66 seconds apart, faster than the FBI's tests of Oswald's rifle with its scope. The HSCA resolved this by finding that the rifle could be fired faster using its iron sights. Representative Dodd did not accept that.[545]

The National Academy of Sciences review

The HSCA recommended that the Justice Department and the National Science Foundation study the acoustics further.[546] The result was a review by a committee of the National Research Council, the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences. Its report, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics*, was published in 1982.[547]

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[541] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 86, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 4, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[542] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 87, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[543] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 91, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[544] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 90, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[545] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 83, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 483, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[546] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 4, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[547] National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not

[Not verified] I was not able to open the text of the 1982 report while researching this book. The publisher's site and the other online copies I tried were blocked or refused my requests. What follows comes from secondary descriptions of the report, mainly an encyclopedia article that quotes it. I could not check those quotes against the report itself.

According to that secondary description, the panel was chaired by the physicist Norman F. Ramsey and released its report on May 14, 1982. It quotes the panel's conclusions as: "The acoustic analyses do not demonstrate that there was a grassy knoll shot," and "The acoustic impulses attributed to gunshots were recorded about one minute after the President had been shot." It also quotes the panel's summary: "Therefore, reliable acoustic data do not support a conclusion that there was a second gunman."[548]

Put another way, the panel concluded that the acoustic analyses did not demonstrate a shot from the grassy knoll and did not support the HSCA's 95 percent figure. The central reason given in those descriptions is timing. The panel found what it took to be "crosstalk" from channel 2, a voice transmission, on the channel 1 recording at the same point as the supposed gunshots. If that voice was recorded about a minute after the shooting, then the sounds the HSCA identified as shots were recorded after the motorcade had already left Dealey Plaza.[549]

Later scientific argument

The argument did not end in 1982. Two later articles in the peer-reviewed forensic journal *Science and Justice* reached opposite results:

- A 2001 article by D. B. Thomas argued for the HSCA's conclusion of a shot from the grassy knoll. He used a different way of lining up the two police radio channels and argued the 1982 panel was wrong. A secondary description reports that he put the certainty that the impulses were gunshots at 96.3 percent.[550]

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opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

[548] Wikipedia, "Dictabelt Evidence Relating to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy" (online encyclopedia article; used only to confirm the wording and details of sources I could not open), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictabelt_evidence_relating_to_the_assassination_of_John_F._Kennedy, accessed November 12, 2026; National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

[549] National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

[550] D. B. Thomas, "Echo Correlation Analysis and the Acoustic Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination Revisited," *Science and Justice* 41, no. 1 (2001): 21-32, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1355-0306(01)71845-X, link not opened during research (article not opened; publication details confirmed only through secondary descriptions); Wikipedia, "Dictabelt Evidence Relating to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy" (online encyclopedia article; used only to confirm the wording and details of sources I could not open),

- A 2005 article by Ralph Linsker and four co-authors, including Richard Garwin and Norman Ramsey, reanalyzed the timing and reaffirmed that the supposed shot sounds were recorded about a minute after the assassination.[551]
- The same secondary description reports a further exchange: Thomas replied, and the Linsker group published a rebuttal in the same journal in 2006.[552]

[Not verified] I could not open any of these articles while researching this book. Their details come from an encyclopedia article that cites them, so I describe their positions in general terms only.

Notice what this argument is about. It is not about whether there was a sound on the tape. It is about when the tape was running. Both sides agree that if the sounds came a minute after the shooting, they cannot be gunshots in Dealey Plaza. Which timing do you find more convincing, and what would you need to see to decide?

Where this leaves the second gunman

Here is my reading, and it is interpretation:

- The HSCA's own report says the second gunman rests "only" on the acoustics.[553]
- The HSCA's own lead expert first put the grassy knoll shot at 50 percent.[554]
- Two committee members said the committee rushed to accept the acoustics evidence.[555]
- The later National Academy review, as widely reported, rejected that evidence.[556]

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictabelt_evidence_relating_to_the_assassination_of_John_F._Kennedy, accessed November 12, 2026.

[551] Ralph Linsker, Richard L. Garwin, Herman Chernoff, Paul Horowitz and Norman F. Ramsey, "Synchronization of the Acoustic Evidence in the Assassination of President Kennedy," *Science and Justice* 45, no. 4 (2005): 207-226, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1355-0306(05)71668-3, link not opened during research (article not opened; publication details confirmed only through secondary descriptions); Wikipedia, "Dictabelt Evidence Relating to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy" (online encyclopedia article; used only to confirm the wording and details of sources I could not open), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictabelt_evidence_relating_to_the_assassination_of_John_F._Kennedy, accessed November 12, 2026.

[552] Wikipedia, "Dictabelt Evidence Relating to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy" (online encyclopedia article; used only to confirm the wording and details of sources I could not open), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictabelt_evidence_relating_to_the_assassination_of_John_F._Kennedy, accessed November 12, 2026.

[553] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 84, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[554] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 72, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[555] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 491, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 498, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-4.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

If the acoustics evidence fails, the HSCA's finding of "a high probability that two gunmen fired" loses its main support. What remains of the HSCA's conspiracy finding is the committee's view that a conspiracy could not be ruled out.[557]

Ask yourself this: if a single recording had been the only evidence that a second person fired, and the experts disagreed about whether that recording even captured the shooting, would you call it proof?

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The HSCA's second gunman finding rested on its acoustics study. Its experts' estimates of a grassy knoll shot ranged from 50 percent to 95 percent or better. The HSCA recommended further scientific study.[558]
- **Interpretation:** The 1982 National Research Council review, as quoted in secondary sources, found that the sounds were recorded about a minute after the shooting. That is its experts' interpretation, and I could not confirm the wording from the report itself.[559]
- **Unknown:** Whether the later scientific debate in *Science and Justice* has been settled. I could not open those articles, so I cannot say.

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[556] National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

[557] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 97, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[558] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 4, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 72-75, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 84, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[559] National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions); Wikipedia, "Dictabelt Evidence Relating to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy" (online encyclopedia article; used only to confirm the wording and details of sources I could not open), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictabelt_evidence_relating_to_the_assassination_of_John_F._Kennedy, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Six: Secrecy and the Records

Much of the lasting suspicion about Dallas comes not from the shooting itself but from what the government kept back afterward. Part Six covers what the agencies withheld from the Warren Commission, and the long, still unfinished effort to open the records.

Chapter 15: What the Agencies Did Not Tell the Warren Commission

Chapter 7 quoted the Warren Commission's statement that "all Government agencies have fully discharged their responsibility to cooperate."[560] This chapter shows why that statement did not hold up. Everything here comes from later official investigations and from the CIA's own historians, not from critics.

The Castro plots

The biggest omission was this: from 1960 into 1963, the CIA was trying to kill Fidel Castro.

According to the Church Committee:

- Between 1960 and early 1963, the CIA tried to use underworld figures to assassinate Castro.[561]
- In 1963, after a decision to increase covert operations against Cuba, the CIA renewed contact with a high-level Cuban official, code-named AMLASH, who proposed overthrowing Castro through an "inside job." AMLASH "considered the assassination of Castro a necessary part" of that plan.[562]
- Castro then issued a public warning about U.S. plotting against Cuban leaders and threatened that Cuba would answer in kind. An interagency committee met on September 12, 1963, agreed Castro was likely to retaliate in some way, but rejected the possibility that he would attack American officials inside the United States.[563]
- On October 29, 1963, Desmond FitzGerald, head of the CIA's Cuba staff, met AMLASH, told him he was the "personal representative" of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and said the United States would support a coup.[564]
- On November 22, 1963, at a pre-arranged meeting, a CIA case officer told AMLASH he would be provided rifles with telescopic sights and explosives. He was also offered a poison pen device.[565]

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[560] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[561] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 8, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[562] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 8, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[563] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 8, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[564] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 8-9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

In other words, on the same day President Kennedy was shot, a CIA officer was meeting a man who planned to kill Castro.

Who knew, and who told the Commission

The Church Committee was blunt: "Neither the CIA nor the FBI told the Warren Commission about the CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro."[566] It added:

- Allen Dulles, a Warren Commission member, "presumably knew about CIA plots during his tenure with the Agency, although he probably was unaware of the AMLASH operation."[567]
- FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and senior FBI officials also knew about the earlier plots.[568]
- "None of the testimony or documents received by the Warren Commission mentioned the CIA assassination plots."[569]
- The working-level officers at the FBI and CIA who dealt with the Commission did not know about the plots.[570]

The Church Committee said the AMLASH plot "was more relevant to the Warren Commission's work" than the earlier plots, because it was in progress at the time of the assassination and could clearly be traced to the CIA.[571] Yet "No one investigated a connection between the AMLASH operation and President Kennedy's assassination."[572]

The HSCA found the same pattern. The CIA's working contact with the Commission, Raymond Rocca, "had no knowledge of efforts by the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro." Former CIA official Richard Helms told the HSCA the agency's position was to give the Commission information only when it was specifically asked, and that he did not mention the Castro plots because he was never "asked to testify before the Warren Commission

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[565] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[566] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[567] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[568] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[569] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[570] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[571] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[572] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

about ...[CIA] operations." The HSCA called that "an unacceptable explanation," because the Commission could not ask about plots it did not know existed.[573]

What the CIA's own historian later wrote

In 2013, CIA historian David Robarge wrote an internal study of how CIA Director John McCone handled the assassination. It was approved for release in 2014.[574]

I was not able to open Robarge's study itself. Two sources describe it:

- A CIA book review published in the agency's journal *Studies in Intelligence* in December 2014 states: "DCI McCone, Helms, and Allen Dulles failed to disclose CIA plots to kill Castro." The same reviewer concluded that the Warren Commission "did an adequate, if not necessarily thorough, job" on the question of Oswald as the lone gunman.[575]
- UPI reported in 2015 that the study described McCone as leading a "benign cover up" that kept "incendiary" information about the CIA from the Warren Commission.[576]

[Not verified] The words "benign cover up" come from news reports of Robarge's study, not from my own reading of it. I did not open the study.

What does "benign" mean here? As reported, the idea is that the CIA kept the Commission focused on what it believed was the true answer, that Oswald acted alone, while hiding the agency's own embarrassing operations. That is not the same as covering up a plot to kill the President. But it is still a cover-up of relevant information. Readers can decide how much the word "benign" softens it.

What the FBI did not tell

The FBI's omissions were different. They were mostly about its own mistakes.

The internal review. Right after the assassination, Hoover ordered a review of how the FBI had handled Oswald. Within six days he received a report detailing "serious investigative deficiencies." Seventeen FBI employees, including one Assistant Director, were

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[573] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 253, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[574] Thomas G. Coffey, review of *A Cruel and Shocking Act* by Philip Shenon, *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (December 2014), Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Review-Cruel-and-Shocking.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[575] Thomas G. Coffey, review of *A Cruel and Shocking Act* by Philip Shenon, *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (December 2014), Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Review-Cruel-and-Shocking.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[576] Shawn Price, "CIA Director Withheld Information About JFK Assassination," UPI, October 13, 2015, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2015/10/13/CIA-director-withheld-information-about-JFK-assassination/4701444710907/, accessed November 12, 2026.

disciplined. The Church Committee found that these facts "were never publicly disclosed by the Bureau or communicated to the Warren Commission."[577]

The destroyed note. As Chapter 5 described, Oswald left a note for Agent James Hosty at the Dallas FBI office before the assassination. After Oswald was killed, the note was destroyed. The Warren Commission was never told the note existed.[578]

Hoover's attitude. The Church Committee found that Hoover "perceived the Warren Commission as an adversary" and said the Commission was "seeking to criticize" the FBI. On two occasions, one right after the report came out, Hoover asked for all derogatory material in FBI files on Warren Commission members and staff.[579]

A narrow investigation. Within weeks of the assassination, "at the urging of senior Government officials," the FBI issued a report concluding that Oswald was the assassin and acted alone, based on "a narrow investigation focused on Oswald."[580]

Questions about Oswald's own files

Once people learned that the agencies had hidden some things, they naturally asked whether the agencies had hidden a relationship with Oswald himself. The HSCA took those questions one at a time. Here are several of them and what the committee found.

Question	What the HSCA found
Why did the CIA wait more than a year to open its main personal file (a "201 file") on Oswald?	A State Department cable of October 31, 1959, reported that Oswald had offered the Soviets information from his work as a Marine radar operator. CIA officials agreed that was important enough to open a file, but the file was not opened until December 9, 1960. The CIA could not explain the delay because the routing records had been destroyed under a 5-year retention rule.
Were 37 documents missing from his CIA file?	A February 1964 memo said so. The file's custodian testified that the documents were not missing but were held elsewhere or by analysts. The committee "regarded this to be

[577] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[578] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 95-97, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[579] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[580] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Question	What the HSCA found
	a plausible explanation."
Did the CIA keep a second, secret file on him?	The committee took the possibility seriously, especially after learning that two CIA officers had once considered using faked files to protect another program. It examined items held outside his main file and did not find evidence of a dual filing system.
Did the CIA debrief Oswald when he came back from the Soviet Union?	The CIA denied any contact with him, and its records were consistent with that. A CIA officer had considered interviewing him in 1962, but the committee found no evidence it happened.
Did a Navy photo marked "CIA" show a relationship?	No. The marking came from an October 1963 CIA request for photos of Oswald to check his reported presence in Mexico City. The committee found the photo "was not evidence that Oswald was a CIA agent."
Did Army intelligence have a file on him?	Yes. An Army intelligence unit in Texas opened a file on Oswald in 1963 as a possible counterintelligence threat after his New Orleans arrest. The Army later destroyed it in what it called routine file management. The committee found this "extremely troublesome," and said that without the file, the question of any military intelligence tie "could not be fully resolved."

Table source: HSCA report, pages 198-225. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[581]

The committee's overall conclusion was that "Nothing in the committee's investigation pointed to official involvement" in a conspiracy, and that the Secret Service, FBI and CIA were not involved.[582]

Notice the last row. It is a good example of how this case keeps producing doubt. A file was destroyed. Its destruction may well have been routine, as the Army said. But once it was

[581] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 198-225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[582] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

gone, no one could prove what was in it, and an open question was left behind that can never now be closed.

Smaller omissions

The HSCA found other gaps. One example: the CIA did not tell the Warren Commission about a conversation, about five hours after the assassination, in which a Cuban consulate employee in Mexico City, Luisa Calderon, seemed to suggest she had advance knowledge of it. The CIA could not explain the omission. The HSCA "uncovered no evidence to suggest that it was due to anything but careless oversight."[583]

Summary of what was withheld

What was withheld	Withheld by	Who later revealed it
CIA plots to kill Castro, including AMLASH, active on November 22, 1963	CIA (FBI also knew of earlier plots)	Church Committee, 1976
FBI discipline of 17 employees over the Oswald case	FBI	Church Committee, 1976
Oswald's note to Agent Hosty, and its destruction	FBI Dallas office	FBI disclosed it publicly in October 1975 after a newsman raised it that July; examined by the Church Committee
Calderon conversation in Mexico City	CIA	HSCA, 1979
McCone's role in withholding the plots	CIA	CIA historian's internal study, released 2014

Table sources: Church Committee Book V, PDF pages 8-10 and 94-97; HSCA report, pages 253-254; Coffey, 2014. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[584]

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[583] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 254, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[584] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 8-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 94-97, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 253-254, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Thomas

What this proves, and what it does not

Here is where I want to be careful, because this is where many books go wrong in one direction or the other.

What the withheld information **proves**: the Warren Commission worked without key facts, and senior officials of the CIA and FBI chose not to give them. The Church Committee said "the possibility exists that senior officials in both agencies made conscious decisions not to disclose potentially important information."[585]

What it **does not prove**: that anyone in the CIA or FBI was involved in the assassination. The Church Committee said its findings did "not lead to the conclusion that there was a conspiracy."[586] The HSCA, with this information in hand, found that the Secret Service, FBI and CIA "were not involved in the assassination."[587]

Both things can be true at once. An agency can hide its own secrets and its own mistakes without having had anything to do with the crime. Ask yourself which of the two the evidence in this chapter actually supports.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The CIA and FBI did not tell the Warren Commission about the CIA's Castro plots. The FBI did not tell it about its internal discipline or Oswald's destroyed note. A CIA officer met AMLASH on November 22, 1963.[588]
- **Interpretation:** A CIA historian, as reported, called McCone's conduct a "benign cover-up." The HSCA judged Helms's explanation "unacceptable."[589]
- **Unknown:** Exactly why senior officials withheld what they knew. The Church Committee said it was "still unclear."[590]

G. Coffey, review of *A Cruel and Shocking Act* by Philip Shenon, *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (December 2014), Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Review-Cruel-and-Shocking.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[585] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[586] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 7, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[587] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[588] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 9-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 95-97, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[589] Shawn Price, "CIA Director Withheld Information About JFK Assassination," UPI, October 13, 2015, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2015/10/13/CIA-director-withheld-information-about-JFK-assassination/4701444710907/, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 253, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 16: Opening the Files, 1992 to 2026

This chapter describes the status of the records as of November 12, 2026, the cutoff date for this book.

For decades, one of the most common reasons people gave for doubting the official story was simple: the government was still keeping secrets. This chapter traces how the records were opened, what is still withheld, and what the most recent releases did and did not show.

The JFK Records Act

By the early 1990s, many assassination records were still closed. The HSCA's unpublished records were sealed until 2029. The FBI had released some 220,000 pages under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) but estimated that about 260,000 more pages were still withheld or unprocessed. The CIA had released about 11,000 pages out of an estimated 250,000 to 300,000.[591]

The Review Board's final report says that Congress was "frustrated by the lack of access and disturbed by the conclusions of Oliver Stone's JFK," a popular film, and responded by passing the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, usually called the JFK Act.[592] It became law on October 26, 1992.[593]

A note on the source: the Review Board's report says "President George W. Bush" signed the bill. The President in October 1992 was George H. W. Bush. I treat that as an error in the report.[594]

The Act did three important things:

- It required every federal agency to find its assassination records and send them to the National Archives.[595]

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[590] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 12, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[591] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[592] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[593] U.S. Congress, *President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992*, Public Law 102-526, 106 Stat. 3443, October 26, 1992 (GovInfo), https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/STATUTE-106/STATUTE-106-Pg3443, accessed November 12, 2026.

[594] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[595] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- It created a presumption that records would be released. Agencies could postpone release only for specific reasons, and the Act set 2017, 25 years after it passed, as the date by which everything was to be released unless the President certified that continued withholding was necessary.[596]
- It created the Assassination Records Review Board.

The Assassination Records Review Board, 1994 to 1998

The Review Board was unusual. It was an independent agency of five private citizens trained in history, archives and law. It could order agencies to declassify records, and only the President could overrule it. The Board called this "the first time in history that an outside group has had such power."[597]

The Board did not try to solve the case. Its job was "to release assassination records so that the public could draw its own conclusions."[598]

Its members were not sworn in until about 18 months after the Act passed, because of the change of administrations. Its work was extended to four years in total.[599]

What it accomplished, by its own account:[600]

- Reviewed and voted on more than 27,000 previously redacted records, and got agency consent to release more than 33,000 more.
- Left "more than four million pages of records" in the National Archives, "available to the public with remarkably few redactions."
- Secured the original Zapruder film for the public (Chapter 11).
- Released 99 percent of an internal CIA study of Oswald's trip to Mexico City.
- Took depositions from 10 people who took part in the autopsy and five Parkland doctors (Chapter 11).
- Obtained the Garrison and Clay Shaw records (Chapter 12).

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[596] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 4, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[597] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[598] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Preface, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[599] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[600] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- Held seven public hearings.

It also admitted a gap. It sought records from Russia, Belarus, Cuba and Mexico, but "these attempts proved frustrating and fruitless." It hoped the Soviet KGB's "voluminous" surveillance records on Oswald would one day be added.[601]

How the Board decided what stayed secret

The JFK Act set a high bar for keeping anything secret. An agency had to show "clear and convincing evidence" that releasing a specific piece of information would cause harm, and the Board had to weigh that harm against the public interest in release.[602]

The fight over CIA officers' names shows how this worked in practice. The CIA first asked the Board to agree to keep the names of all CIA officers in the collection secret until 2017. It argued that its intelligence work depended on officers keeping their cover, and that it had promised confidentiality to former employees.[603]

The Board refused a blanket rule and demanded evidence for each name. When the CIA was slow to provide it, the Board set special "name days" in December 1995, May 1996 and May 1997 for the agency to make its case. By May 1996, the Board had settled on a standard: it would protect a name if the CIA showed the officer had retired under cover or abroad, objected to release when contacted, was involved in an identified ongoing operation, or was still active with the agency. For officers of especially high public interest, it demanded even more.[604]

That case-by-case approach is part of why so many records came out with "remarkably few redactions."[605] It is also why the Board wanted its approach to outlive it.

What the Board recommended

The Board ended its final report with ten recommendations. Most were about government secrecy in general, not about Dallas. Among them:[606]

- Future declassification boards should be "genuinely independent."

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[601] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[602] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[603] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 5, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[604] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 5, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[605] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[606] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- Serious declassification efforts need laws with "a presumption of openness," clear standards, an enforceable appeals process and enough money.
- The National Archives should have the authority and means to carry out the Board's decisions after the Board ended.
- The number of officials who can classify documents, and the time documents stay classified, should both be reduced.

The Board's broader point was that secrecy itself had done damage. As its report put it, "30 years of government secrecy relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy led the American public to believe that the government had something to hide."[607]

The 2017 deadline and the years after

The 2017 deadline came, and the records were not all released. The National Archives says that by then "The vast majority of the Collection (88%) has been open in full and released to the public since the late 1990s." The rest had been withheld in full or in part.[608]

Here is what followed:

Date	What happened	Source
July 2017 to April 2018	Seven releases, from 676 to 18,731 documents each	NARA 2017-2018 release page
By December 15, 2021	Release of records cleared under a presidential memorandum on temporary certification	NARA 2021 release page
By December 15, 2022	Further release under the same process	NARA 2022 release page
April to August 2023	Joint review of remaining redactions in 3,648 documents; 2,672 documents posted between April and June 2023	NARA 2023 release page
January 23, 2025	Executive Order 14176	NARA collection page

[607] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[608] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2017-2018 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2017-2018, accessed November 12, 2026.

Date	What happened	Source
	signed	
March 18 to April 3, 2025	Five releases totaling 83,621 pages	NARA 2025 release page
January 30, 2026	Further release of 11,022 pages in 140 PDF files	NARA 2025 release page

Table sources: NARA release pages for 2017-2018, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2025. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[609]

The 2025 releases

Executive Order 14176, signed January 23, 2025, said "it is in the national interest to finally release all records related to these assassinations without delay."[610]

The National Archives' 2025 release page says that, following a presidential directive of March 17, 2025, "all records previously withheld for classification" in the collection were released.[611] The page lists these releases:[612]

Release	Pages	PDF files
March 18, 2025, 7 p.m.	31,419	1,123
March 18, 2025, 10:30 p.m.	37,127	1,062
March 20, 2025	14,318	161
March 26, 2025	53	16

[609] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2017-2018 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2017-2018, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2021 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2021, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2022 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2022, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2023 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2023, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "JFK Assassination Records" (collection home page; page last reviewed March 19, 2025), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk, accessed November 12, 2026.

[610] National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "JFK Assassination Records" (collection home page; page last reviewed March 19, 2025), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk, accessed November 12, 2026.

[611] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[612] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

Release	Pages	PDF files
April 3, 2025	704	207
January 30, 2026	11,022	140

Table source: NARA, 2025 Documents Release page, last reviewed January 30, 2026, as checked November 12, 2026.[613]

A disagreement about the numbers

News reports gave different page counts for March 2025. The Associated Press reported about 2,200 files and more than 63,000 pages.[614] Other outlets reported higher figures. The National Archives' own page, which says its early counts were estimates that it later corrected, adds up to 83,621 pages for the five releases from March 18 to April 3.[615] I use the Archives' figures.

Personal information

The National Archives says that, "In an effort to maximize transparency, these records were released without redactions and some of these records contain the personal identification information of living individuals." It said it was working with the Social Security Administration to protect the people affected.[616] The AP reported that the exposed information included Social Security numbers.[617] I do not repeat any of that information in this book.

New FBI records

The Archives also reported that the FBI found additional assassination-related records while inventorying closed case files from its field offices. The FBI delivered them to the

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[613] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[614] John Hanna and Jamie Stengle, "Newly Released JFK Assassination Files Reveal More About CIA but Don't Yet Point to Conspiracies," Associated Press, March 19, 2025 (as republished by WSLS), https://www.wsls.com/news/national/2025/03/19/newly-released-jfk-assassination-files-reveal-more-about-cia-but-dont-yet-point-to-conspiracies/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[615] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026; Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[616] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[617] John Hanna, "A Dump of JFK-Related Records Reveals Past CIA Secrets but Also Some Personal Data," Associated Press, March 21, 2025 (as republished by KSAT), https://www.ksat.com/news/national/2025/03/21/a-dump-of-jfk-related-records-reveals-past-cia-secrets-but-also-some-personal-data/, accessed November 12, 2026.

Archives on February 20, 2025, with more transferred between March and June 2025. These records were released with redactions only for grand jury information.[618]

What is still withheld

As of November 12, 2026, here is what the National Archives' own pages say remains withheld:

- **Grand jury and court-sealed information,** which Section 10 of the JFK Act covers.[619]
- **Tax return information** protected by federal tax law, and records given to the government by private citizens under deeds of gift, which Section 11 covers.[620]
- **Parts of the CIA's Mexico City Station History.** The Archives says that all assassination-related information in that document "is fully available to the public," but that the CIA may continue to withhold parts that do not relate to the assassination.[621]

[Not verified] I did not find any National Archives description of what the January 30, 2026 release contains, beyond its size. I also could not confirm whether any further releases occurred between January 30, 2026 and this book's cutoff date. The 2025 release page, which I rechecked on November 12, 2026, still showed January 30, 2026 as its last update.[622]

An outside view: the Mary Ferrell Foundation

The government's pages are not the only count. The Mary Ferrell Foundation, a private research group, keeps one of the largest online collections of assassination records. I list it as a Tier 5 source. It describes itself as "a non-profit 501(c)(3) group" and says its archive "contains nearly 2 million pages of documents, government reports, books, essays, hours of multimedia, and innovative research tools."[623] Its founder, Rex Bradford, wrote the essay below. Because the Foundation's work centers on getting these records into public view, I treat his essay as the view of an interested party, not a neutral finding.

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[618] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[619] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[620] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[621] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[622] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[623] Mary Ferrell Foundation, "About MFF", https://maryferrell.org/pages/About_MFF.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

In an essay dated April 2026, Bradford wrote that under Executive Order 14176, "some 2709 documents were posted, consisting of nearly 100,000 pages," counting the March to April 2025 releases and the January 30, 2026 release. That figure is close to the Archives' own numbers: 83,621 pages in 2025 plus 11,022 in January 2026 is 94,643 pages.[624]

His essay made several other points worth knowing:[625]

- The records still withheld are mainly those held back lawfully under Sections 10 and 11 of the JFK Act, which agrees with the Archives' page.
- At the end of 2025 the Foundation had counted more than 50 documents that still had redactions. By April 2026, it said, "Only a small handful of that set still feature redactions."
- Only "roughly 30%" of the collection is available online, by the Foundation's estimate. Many HSCA and Review Board files can be seen only in person at the Archives' College Park, Maryland, building.
- The Archives also released records on the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. in 2025.

His summary was that the collection is "now public essentially in full" but "not all available online," and that "the era of large-scale releases is done."[626]

This matters for Claim 9 in Chapter 18. A group whose work centers on getting the records released, and which would have every reason to say more is hidden, now says the collection is essentially public. That does not prove the records hold no surprises. It does mean the argument has moved from "they won't release the files" to "what do the files say, and can you find them?"

What did the 2025 files show?

The news coverage at the time was consistent:

- The AP reported that the files revealed more about the CIA but "don't yet point to conspiracies." It quoted the journalist Philip Shenon: "Nothing points to a second gunman."[627]

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[624] Rex Bradford, "State of the JFK Releases 2026," Mary Ferrell Foundation, April 2026, https://maryferrell.org/pages/State_of_JFK_Releases_2026.html, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[625] Rex Bradford, "State of the JFK Releases 2026," Mary Ferrell Foundation, April 2026, https://maryferrell.org/pages/State_of_JFK_Releases_2026.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[626] Rex Bradford, "State of the JFK Releases 2026," Mary Ferrell Foundation, April 2026, https://maryferrell.org/pages/State_of_JFK_Releases_2026.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[627] John Hanna and Jamie Stengle, "Newly Released JFK Assassination Files Reveal More About CIA but Don't Yet Point to Conspiracies," Associated Press, March 19, 2025 (as republished by WSLS),

- CBS News reported that the release "did not appear to contain significant new revelations about the assassination."[628]
- Jefferson Morley of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, a research group that has long pressed for full release of the records, told CBS, "This is the most positive news on the release of JFK files since the 1990s."[629]

Note what Morley praised: the openness, not a new finding about who killed the President. Chapter 18 tests the claim that the 2025 files "proved" or "disproved" anything.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The JFK Act passed in 1992. The Review Board opened records through 1998. By 2017, 88 percent of the collection was fully open. The 2025 releases and a January 30, 2026 release added more than 94,000 pages. Some records remain withheld under Sections 10 and 11 of the Act.[630]
- **Interpretation:** News organizations in March 2025 judged that the newly released files did not contain major new revelations about the assassination.[631]
- **Unknown:** What the January 30, 2026 release contains, and what the Soviet KGB's files on Oswald would show if they were ever released.[632]

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https://www.wsls.com/news/national/2025/03/19/newly-released-jfk-assassination-files-reveal-more-about-cia-but-dont-yet-point-to-conspiracies/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[628] Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[629] Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[630] U.S. Congress, *President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992*, Public Law 102-526, 106 Stat. 3443, October 26, 1992 (GovInfo), https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/STATUTE-106/STATUTE-106-Pg3443, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2017-2018 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2017-2018, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[631] John Hanna and Jamie Stengle, "Newly Released JFK Assassination Files Reveal More About CIA but Don't Yet Point to Conspiracies," Associated Press, March 19, 2025 (as republished by WSLS), https://www.wsls.com/news/national/2025/03/19/newly-released-jfk-assassination-files-reveal-more-about-cia-but-dont-yet-point-to-conspiracies/, accessed November 12, 2026; Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[632] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Seven: Testing the Claims

The verdicts in Part Seven reflect the public record as of November 12, 2026.

Now we put the records to work. Part Seven takes seventeen popular claims and tests each one against the evidence covered in Parts One to Six. For each claim, I state it in its common form, lay out what the records show, and give a verdict using the four labels from the Introduction: True, Partly true, False (debunked), or Inconclusive.

A verdict here is my judgment. I show the two or three main sources behind each one so you can check it and disagree with me if the evidence leads you somewhere else.

Chapter 17: Who Did It? Claims About the Shooter and the Plotters

This chapter covers the claims about who shot the President and who might have been behind it.

Claim 1: "Oswald acted alone."

What the records show.

- Both the Warren Commission and the HSCA found that Oswald fired the shots that struck the President, from the sixth-floor window, with his own rifle.[633]
- The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald acted alone, but said "the possibility of others being involved with either Oswald or Ruby cannot be established categorically."[634]
- The HSCA concluded the President was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy" but could not identify any other gunman or conspirator.[635]
- The HSCA's conspiracy finding depended mainly on the acoustics evidence, which was later disputed (Chapter 14).[636]

Verdict: Inconclusive.

The two official investigations that tested this question reached different conclusions, and nothing has settled it. That said, one part of this claim is about as well supported as anything in the case: Oswald was the gunman whose shots struck the President. What remains open is whether anyone else helped him, knew in advance or fired as well.

Verdict	Main sources

[633] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[634] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[635] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[636] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 84, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive (Oswald as the shooter who hit the President is well supported)	Warren Commission report, pages 19-22; HSCA report, pages 1-2 and 84; Chapter 14 on the acoustics review

Claim 2: "A shot came from the grassy knoll."

What the records show.

- Witnesses disagreed. Of 178 witnesses the HSCA counted, 21 thought the shots came from the grassy knoll and 49 from the Depository; most could not tell or gave other answers.[637]
- The HSCA concluded there was a "high probability" of a shot from the knoll, based on acoustics, but said that shot missed.[638]
- The original autopsy and all three later expert medical reviews, including the HSCA's, found that both bullets that struck the President came from behind.[639]
- The 1982 National Research Council review, as widely reported, concluded the acoustics did not show a knoll shot.[640]

Verdict: Inconclusive.

The claim as commonly stated, that a shot was fired from the knoll, rests mainly on disputed acoustics and conflicting witness memories. There is no physical evidence of such a shot. But a stronger version you will often hear, that **the fatal shot came from the knoll**, is a different matter. That version is **False (debunked)**: the authenticated autopsy materials show the head wound came from behind, and even the HSCA, which believed in a knoll shot, said it missed.

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[637] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 87, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[638] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 80, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[639] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 41-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[640] National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive (the "fatal shot from the knoll" version is False)	HSCA report, pages 41-43, 80 and 87; National Research Council, 1982

Claim 3: "The CIA killed Kennedy."

What the records show.

- The CIA hid its Castro plots from the Warren Commission, and its own historian later described the Director's conduct as, in news reports' words, a "benign cover up" (Chapter 15).[641]
- The Church Committee, which had broad access to CIA records and was openly critical of the agency, found no evidence "sufficient to justify a conclusion that there was a conspiracy."[642]
- The HSCA, after examining Oswald's CIA file and the agency's operations, found that the CIA "was not involved."[643]
- The HSCA found "no evidence of any relationship between Oswald and the CIA."[644]

Verdict: False (debunked).

The CIA's secrecy was real, and it is the strongest reason this claim persists. But hiding embarrassing operations is not the same as killing a President. The two congressional investigations with the most access to CIA records, both of them critical of the agency, found no evidence that it was involved.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	HSCA report, pages 1-2 and 225; Church Committee Book V, PDF pages 10-11

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[641] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Shawn Price, "CIA Director Withheld Information About JFK Assassination," UPI, October 13, 2015, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2015/10/13/CIA-director-withheld-information-about-JFK-assassination/4701444710907/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[642] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 11, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[643] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 181, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[644] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Claim 4: "The Mafia killed Kennedy."

What the records show.

- The HSCA found that organized crime, "as a group, was not involved," but that "the available evidence does not preclude the possibility that individual members may have been involved."[645]
- It found that it was possible "an individual organized crime leader, or a small combination of leaders, might have participated," and named Carlos Marcello and Santos Trafficante as the most likely.[646]
- It found Marcello had "the motive, means and opportunity," but "was unable to establish direct evidence of Marcello's complicity." It cautioned that "association is the first step in conspiracy; it is not identical to it."[647]
- It found "abundant evidence" that Jack Ruby knew organized crime figures, but did not find that Ruby acted for them (Chapter 6).[648]

Verdict: Inconclusive.

This is the one major conspiracy theory that an official investigation explicitly left open. The HSCA did not say the Mafia did it. It said some individual mob leaders could have and that it could not rule them out. No later release has added direct evidence either way that I could find.

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive	HSCA report, pages 1-2, 169 and 179

Claim 5: "Cuba or the Soviet Union was behind it."

What the records show.

- The HSCA concluded, "on the basis of the evidence available to it," that neither the Soviet government nor the Cuban government was involved.[649]

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[645] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[646] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 169, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[647] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 169, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[648] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 179, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[649] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- On the Soviet Union, it agreed with former Secretary of State Dean Rusk that there was no evidence the Soviet government had any interest in removing President Kennedy. It also said it was "quite likely that the Soviet Government withheld files on a KGB interview with Oswald."[650]
- On Cuba, it did not take Castro's denials at face value, but found "persuasive reasons" to conclude Cuba was not involved, including the huge risk of retaliation.[651]
- The Church Committee said it had "seen no evidence that Fidel Castro or others in the Cuban government plotted" the assassination.[652]
- The Review Board tried to get records from Russia and Cuba and failed.[653]

Verdict: False (debunked), with one caveat.

Every official investigation that looked at this found no evidence of Soviet or Cuban government involvement. The caveat is that Soviet and Cuban government files have never been fully opened to U.S. investigators. If they ever are, this verdict should be checked again.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	HSCA report, pages 1-2, 103 and 129; Church Committee Book V, PDF page 7

Claim 6: "Lyndon Johnson was behind it."

What the records show.

- The argument for this claim rests on motive: Johnson became President.
- None of the official investigations covered in this book, including the HSCA with its broad mandate to look for conspirators, found evidence linking Johnson to the assassination. The groups the HSCA named in its findings on possible conspirators did not include him or anyone acting for him.[654]

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[650] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 103, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[651] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 129, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[652] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 7, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[653] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[654] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- The physical evidence ties the shooting to Oswald (Chapter 8), and no investigation found any link between Oswald and Johnson.[655]
- In Gallup's 2023 survey, 2 percent of Americans who believed in a conspiracy named Johnson when asked who else was involved.[656]

Verdict: False (debunked).

Under the definition in the Introduction, this means the claim has been looked into and no credible evidence supports it, while the evidence points elsewhere. Motive alone is not evidence. Many people benefited in some way from the President's death; that does not make them suspects.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	Warren Commission report, page 19; HSCA report, pages 1-2

Claim 7: "Oswald was a CIA or FBI agent or informant."

What the records show.

- The Warren Commission found "nothing to support the speculation that Oswald was an agent, employee, or informant of the FBI, the CIA, or any other governmental agency."[657]
- The HSCA reexamined the question in detail, including Oswald's CIA file and FBI agents' sworn statements. It concluded "there was no credible evidence that Oswald was ever an informant for the Bureau."[658]
- On the CIA, it found "no evidence of any relationship between Oswald and the CIA."[659]

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[655] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[656] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[657] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 22, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[658] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 185, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[659] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- The agencies did keep files on Oswald, and the FBI had contact with him (Chapter 5). Having a file on someone is not the same as employing him.[660]

Verdict: False (debunked).

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	Warren Commission report, page 22; HSCA report, pages 185 and 225

Claim 15: "Kennedy was killed to stop him from pulling out of Vietnam."

I take this claim out of order because it is about motive, like the others in this chapter.

What the records show.

- The Review Board noted that historians still debate "whether President Kennedy would have escalated U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War had he lived, or whether he would have lessened involvement and even withdrawn."[661]
- Because of that debate, the Board searched for records on Kennedy's and Johnson's Vietnam policy and added them to the collection. It said the perceived change in policy "has provided another source of fodder for conspiracies."[662]
- The Board did not report finding any record connecting Vietnam policy to the assassination.[663]
- No official investigation found evidence that anyone killed the President over Vietnam, and the evidence on the shooter points to Oswald, whose motives as described by both investigations had nothing to do with Vietnam.[664]

Verdict: False (debunked) as a claim about why the President was killed.

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[660] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[661] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part I, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[662] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part I, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[663] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part I, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[664] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 22-23, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 61, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

The policy question underneath it, what Kennedy would have done in Vietnam, is a real and open historical debate. But the claim that he was killed over it has no support in the records.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	ARRB Final Report, chapter 6, part I; Warren Commission report, pages 22-23; HSCA report, page 61

Summary of this chapter's verdicts

#	Claim	Verdict
1	Oswald acted alone	Inconclusive
2	A shot came from the grassy knoll	Inconclusive (the fatal shot from the knoll: False)
3	The CIA killed Kennedy	False (debunked)
4	The Mafia killed Kennedy	Inconclusive
5	Cuba or the Soviet Union was behind it	False (debunked)
6	Lyndon Johnson was behind it	False (debunked)
7	Oswald was a CIA or FBI agent or informant	False (debunked)
15	Kennedy was killed to stop him leaving Vietnam	False (debunked)

Table sources: the verdict tables in this chapter. Table current as of November 12, 2026.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** No official investigation found evidence that the CIA, FBI, Secret Service, the Soviet government or the Cuban government took part in the assassination.[665]

[665] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 11, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

- **Interpretation:** The verdicts in this chapter are my judgments, based on the sources listed with each one.
- **Unknown:** Whether any individual organized crime figure was involved, and what Soviet and Cuban government files might show.[666]

[666] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 103, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 18: Claims About the Evidence, the Cover-Up and the Files

This chapter tests the claims about the physical evidence, the investigations and the records.

Claim 8: "The magic bullet is impossible."

What the records show.

- The Warren Commission said there was "very persuasive evidence from the experts" that one bullet passed through the President's neck and caused all of Governor Connally's wounds.[667]
- The HSCA's forensic pathology panel found the wounds "consistent with" that path, and its wound ballistics expert said the bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, could have caused the wounds "without showing any more deformity than it does."[668]
- The HSCA's photographic panel found the two men's alignment "consistent with the single bullet theory."[669]
- Governor Connally believed he was hit by a separate shot, and one HSCA panel member, Dr. Cyril Wecht, dissented.[670]

Verdict: False (debunked).

The word "impossible" is what fails here. Two investigations, using different experts fifteen years apart, found the single bullet path not only possible but probable. You can still doubt it. Dr. Wecht did. But the claim that it could not have happened is contradicted by the expert evidence. The bullet was also not "pristine" in the sense of undamaged; it was slightly damaged (Chapter 10).

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	Warren Commission report, page 19; HSCA

[667] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[668] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 44-45, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[669] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 46, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[670] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 49, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Verdict	Main sources
	report, pages 44-46

Claim 9: "The government is still hiding the truth in withheld files."

What the records show.

- For decades, this was largely true in a narrow sense. Before 1992, the FBI and CIA held hundreds of thousands of pages they had not released.[671]
- By 2017, 88 percent of the collection had been fully open since the late 1990s.[672]
- In March 2025, the National Archives said "all records previously withheld for classification" in the collection had been released.[673]
- As of this book's cutoff, what remains withheld falls under Sections 10 and 11 of the JFK Act (grand jury, court-sealed and tax information, plus some donated records), and parts of the CIA's Mexico City Station History that the Archives says do not relate to the assassination.[674]
- News reviews of the 2025 releases found no major new revelations about the assassination.[675]

Verdict: Partly true.

The government did hide important information for a long time, and a small amount is still withheld for legal reasons. But the claim as usually meant, that a hidden file holds "the truth" about who killed the President, has no support. With classified withholding ended in 2025, the remaining gaps are narrow and mostly legal. The biggest known gap is not

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[671] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[672] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2017-2018 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2017-2018, accessed November 12, 2026.

[673] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[674] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[675] John Hanna and Jamie Stengle, "Newly Released JFK Assassination Files Reveal More About CIA but Don't Yet Point to Conspiracies," Associated Press, March 19, 2025 (as republished by WSLS), https://www.wsls.com/news/national/2025/03/19/newly-released-jfk-assassination-files-reveal-more-about-cia-but-dont-yet-point-to-conspiracies/, accessed November 12, 2026; Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

American at all: the Soviet KGB's files on Oswald, which the Review Board could not obtain.[676]

Verdict	Main sources
Partly true	NARA 2017-2018 and 2025 release pages; ARRB Final Report, Executive Summary and chapter 1

Claim 10: "The Warren Commission was a cover-up."

What the records show.

- The HSCA found that the Commission "arrived at its conclusions, based on the evidence available to it, in good faith."[677]
- The HSCA also found the Commission failed to investigate conspiracy adequately, partly because agencies did not give it everything, and presented its conclusions "in a fashion that was too definitive."[678]
- The CIA and FBI withheld the Castro plots and other information from the Commission (Chapter 15).[679]
- A CIA historian's internal study, as reported by UPI, described the CIA Director's conduct as a "benign cover up" that kept "incendiary" information from the Commission.[680]

Verdict: Partly true.

There was a cover-up, but it was aimed at the Commission, not run by it. The agencies kept facts from the Commission. No investigation found that the Commission members themselves knowingly hid the truth. One member, Allen Dulles, presumably knew of earlier CIA plots against Castro and did not raise them, which is the closest the record comes to a cover-up from inside the Commission.[681]

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[676] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.
[677] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[678] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.
[679] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.
[680] Shawn Price, "CIA Director Withheld Information About JFK Assassination," UPI, October 13, 2015, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2015/10/13/CIA-director-withheld-information-about-JFK-assassination/4701444710907/, accessed November 12, 2026.
[681] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Verdict	Main sources
Partly true	HSCA report, pages 1-2; Church Committee Book V, PDF page 10; UPI, 2015

Claim 11: "The Zapruder film was altered."

What the records show.

- The HSCA's photographic panel used the film extensively to time the shots and judge reactions. Its report, as reviewed for this book, does not raise any finding that the film was altered.[682]
- The Review Board arranged what it called "the first known authenticity study of the Zapruder Film."[683]
- Eastman Kodak's retired 8 mm film expert, Roland Zavada, studied the film's edge prints, emulsion, the camera and the chain-of-custody documents from November 1963. He also studied "perceived 'anomalies'" in the original. His report was scheduled to be finished by September 30, 1998, after the Board's final report was written.[684]
- The film's chain of custody from Abraham Zapruder to the National Archives is documented (Chapter 11).[685]
- A secondary source, an encyclopedia article, reports that Zavada "ran experiments with the same type of film that Zapruder used" and concluded that "the resulting motion picture is authentic." That article spells his first name "Ronald"; the Review Board's report spells it "Roland."[686]

[Not verified] I was not able to open Zavada's report itself, so I cannot quote its conclusions from the original. The Review Board's final report describes the study but was finished before the report was complete.

Verdict: Inconclusive on the record I was able to check, with no official finding of alteration.

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[682] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 47, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[683] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[684] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[685] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[686] Wikipedia, "Zapruder Film" (online encyclopedia article; used only for a secondary description of the Zavada study), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapruder_film, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

No official investigation found that the film was altered, and the one secondary description of the Kodak study I found says it judged the film authentic. But I could not verify that study's conclusions from the report itself. If you can read it, and it says what the secondary source says, this verdict should move to False (debunked). That is a gap in my research, not a finding against the film.

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive (no official finding of alteration)	ARRB Final Report, Executive Summary and chapter 6, part II; HSCA report, pages 44-47; Wikipedia, "Zapruder Film" (secondary)

Claim 12: "Kennedy's body or the autopsy evidence was altered."

What the records show.

- The HSCA had forensic anthropologists, a forensic dentist, photographic scientists and radiologists test the autopsy photographs and X-rays. They concluded the materials were of President Kennedy and found "no evidence of the photographic or radiographic materials having been altered."[687]
- The Review Board found real problems with the autopsy record: destroyed notes and draft, imprecise measurements, no complete contemporaneous count of the photographs, and no proper chain of custody for all materials.[688]
- A witness, Saundra Spencer, testified that photographs she developed in 1963 "were different from those in the National Archives since 1966."[689]
- The autopsy photographer raised questions about whether the brain photographs now in the Archives are the ones he took. His former assistant, who had claimed the photographs were altered based on public copies, re-evaluated that view after seeing the originals.[690]

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[687] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 42-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[688] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[689] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[690] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

- The Review Board drew no conclusion that anything was altered. It warned that witnesses, after 35 years, "contradict not only each other, but sometimes themselves."[691]

Verdict: False (debunked), with real gaps in the record.

The one scientific test of whether the photographs and X-rays were altered found no alteration, and the materials were matched to President Kennedy by several methods. The Review Board's findings show that the autopsy record was handled poorly and is incomplete. Poor handling creates room for doubt, but it is not evidence of alteration.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked), record incomplete	HSCA report, pages 42-43; ARRB Final Report, chapter 6, part II

Claim 13: "Dozens of witnesses died mysteriously."

What the records show.

- This claim usually takes the form of a list of people connected to the case who died in the years after 1963, sometimes with a statistic said to show the deaths were too many to be chance.
- **[Not verified]** None of the official report texts I searched for this book, the Warren Commission report, the HSCA report and its summary, the Church Committee's Book V or the Review Board's final report, contains an analysis of witness deaths. I searched each for terms such as "deaths of witnesses," "mysterious death" and "actuarial" and found nothing relevant. I am aware that the HSCA's supporting volumes may address the question, but I could not open them.
- A secondary source reports that lists of deaths began with Penn Jones Jr. in 1966, and that Jim Marrs listed 103 people in 1989. It also reports that Vincent Bugliosi, a Tier 5 author who argues Oswald acted alone, called the claim "one of the very most popular and durable myths."[692]
- The Warren Commission itself checked one early version of this claim. A rumor said that "The son of the only witness to the Tippit slaying was arrested after talking to some private investigators and soon plunged to his death from an unbarred jail window." The Commission found that the son who talked to the visitors had been in

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[691] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[692] Wikipedia, "John F. Kennedy Assassination Conspiracy Theories" (online encyclopedia article; used only for a secondary description of the witness-deaths claim), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._Kennedy_assassination_conspiracy_theories, accessed November 12, 2026.

Virginia at the time of the shooting. A different son was arrested on a burglary charge, fell about 20 feet while trying to escape, was treated at Parkland Hospital and, as of July 31, 1964, was alive in the Dallas County Jail awaiting trial.[693]

- Some deaths are documented in the records. For example, David Ferrie died within days of being named by Jim Garrison, and Jack Ruby died before his new trial, on January 3, 1967, of a pulmonary embolism after he had been diagnosed with cancer.[694]

Verdict: Inconclusive on the record I could check.

A list of deaths is not evidence of murder unless each death is shown to be suspicious. I could not find an official study that tested the claim either way. Treat any list or statistic you see with caution, and ask for the source of each death and the source of the statistic.

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive (not tested in the report texts reviewed)	Warren Commission report, page 667; HSCA report, page 142; ARRB Final Report, chapter 1

Claim 14: "A Secret Service agent fired the fatal shot by accident."

What the records show.

- Special Agent George W. Hickey Jr., in the follow-up car, "picked up and cocked an automatic rifle as he heard the last shot," according to the Warren Commission.[695]
- The HSCA also noted that Hickey had an AR-15 rifle raised in the follow-up car.[696]
- The bullet fragments recovered from the front seat of the limousine were fired from Oswald's rifle "to the exclusion of all other weapons." The HSCA's firearms panel confirmed this.[697]

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[693] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 667, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[694] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; Wikipedia, "Jack Ruby" (online encyclopedia article; used only for the date and cause of Ruby's death), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Ruby, accessed November 12, 2026.

[695] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 51, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[696] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 606, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/references1-jfk.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

- The HSCA found that the Secret Service "was not involved in the assassination."[698]

Verdict: False (debunked).

The agent did have a rifle, which is what gives the claim its start. But the Warren Commission's account has him picking it up as he heard the last shot, and the bullet fragments from the head shot were matched to Oswald's rifle by two separate firearms examinations.

Verdict	Main sources
False (debunked)	Warren Commission report, pages 18 and 51; HSCA report, pages 50 and 606

Claim 16: "The 2025 releases proved a conspiracy" and "The 2025 releases showed nothing new."

These are opposite claims, so I test both the same way.

What the records show.

- The 2025 and January 2026 releases added more than 94,000 pages, by the National Archives' count.[699]
- The AP reported that the files "reveal more about CIA but don't yet point to conspiracies," and quoted journalist Philip Shenon: "Nothing points to a second gunman."[700]
- CBS News reported that the release "did not appear to contain significant new revelations about the assassination."[701]
- The AP also reported that the files revealed past CIA secrets, including a 1961 memo by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.[702]

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[697] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[698] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[699] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[700] John Hanna and Jamie Stengle, "Newly Released JFK Assassination Files Reveal More About CIA but Don't Yet Point to Conspiracies," Associated Press, March 19, 2025 (as republished by WSLS), https://www.wsls.com/news/national/2025/03/19/newly-released-jfk-assassination-files-reveal-more-about-cia-but-dont-yet-point-to-conspiracies/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[701] Stefan Becket, "JFK Files Related to Assassination Released by Trump Administration," CBS News, updated March 19, 2025, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-jfk-assassination-files-released-2025/, accessed November 12, 2026.

Verdicts:

- "The 2025 releases proved a conspiracy": **False (debunked).** No news review I found, including from writers who have been critical of the official account, said the files showed a conspiracy.
- "The 2025 releases showed nothing new": **Partly true.** They showed nothing new about who killed the President, but they did reveal new details about CIA operations and other government activity of the time.

Verdict	Main sources
"Proved a conspiracy": False (debunked). "Nothing new": Partly true	NARA 2025 release page; AP, March 19 and 21, 2025; CBS News, March 19, 2025

[Not verified] I could not find any description of what the January 30, 2026 release contains, so these verdicts rest on the 2025 releases only.

Claim 17: "Jack Ruby killed Oswald to silence him."

What the records show.

- The Warren Commission found no evidence that Ruby was part of any conspiracy.[703]
- The HSCA found that Ruby's shooting of Oswald was "not a spontaneous act," involved "at least some premeditation," and that it was "less likely" he got into the basement without help, though any helper may not have known his intent.[704]
- The HSCA found "abundant evidence" that Ruby knew organized crime figures, but said that "falls considerably short" of proving a conspiracy.[705]
- Ruby always maintained he was not involved in the assassination.[706]

Verdict: Inconclusive.

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[702] John Hanna, "A Dump of JFK-Related Records Reveals Past CIA Secrets but Also Some Personal Data," Associated Press, March 21, 2025 (as republished by KSAT), https://www.ksat.com/news/national/2025/03/21/a-dump-of-jfk-related-records-reveals-past-cia-secrets-but-also-some-personal-data/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[703] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 21, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[704] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[705] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 179, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[706] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

The two investigations disagree about how planned Ruby's act was and whether he had help. Neither found evidence that anyone sent him to silence Oswald. The motive question is open.

Verdict	Main sources
Inconclusive	Warren Commission report, page 21; HSCA report, pages 157 and 179

The Commission's own list of rumors

Many of the claims in Part Seven are older than most readers realize. The Warren Commission devoted an appendix, "Speculations and Rumors," to answering them in 1964. It explained why rumors spread so fast: witnesses "did not see and hear the same thing," and "later corrections have difficulty overtaking the original sensational reports."[707]

Here is a sample of the rumors it took up and what it found. You can read the full list yourself; it runs more than 30 pages.

Rumor in 1964	What the Commission found
A rifle cartridge was found on the railroad overpass.	"No cartridge of any kind was found on the overpass nor has any witness come forward to claim having found one."
The President's car stopped after the first shot.	The car "did not stop or almost come to a complete halt." Films show it "slowed down momentarily after the shot that struck the President in the head and then speeded up rapidly."
There was a bullet hole in the front windshield.	"The windshield was not penetrated by any bullet." Lead residue was found on the inside surface and small cracks on the outside.
Parkland doctors said the throat wound came from the front.	The doctors first thought it could be either an entry or an exit wound, and after the autopsy findings they "agreed that it was an exit wound."
A widely published photo shows Oswald on	The man was Billy Lovelady, a Depository employee who "somewhat resembles

[707] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 637-638, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Rumor in 1964	What the Commission found
the Depository steps during the shooting.	Oswald," and he and his coworkers identified him.
The motorcade route was changed at the last minute.	The route "was decided upon on November 18 and published in the Dallas newspapers on November 19. It was not changed in any way thereafter."
The rifle was a German Mauser.	The deputy who called it a Mauser "had little more than a glimpse of it" and did not handle it.
The backyard photo of Oswald with the rifle is a fake.	Marina Oswald testified she took it with Oswald's camera, and "Experts also state the picture was not a composite."
Oswald and Officer Tippit knew each other.	There was "no evidence that Oswald and Tippit were acquainted," and witnesses saw "no signs of recognition."
Oswald and Ruby were seen together at Ruby's club.	All such reports were investigated. "None of them merits any credence."
Oswald secretly flew from Mexico City to Havana.	The Commission found "no evidence that Oswald made any flight to Cuba while he was in Mexico."
Oswald was an FBI or CIA agent.	The heads of both agencies testified that he was never employed or used by either one. Even Oswald's mother told the Commission, "I cannot prove Lee is an agent."

Table source: Warren Commission report, Appendix XII, pages 640-667. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[708]

[708] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 640-641, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 641-642, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 643, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 644, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp.

Two cautions go with this table. First, these are the Commission's findings, and the Commission is one of the bodies whose work is under test in this book. Where a later investigation looked at the same point, I have covered it in the chapter on that topic. The HSCA, for example, reexamined the backyard photographs and the question of Oswald and the agencies.[709] Second, answering a rumor in 1964 did not make it go away. Several of these rumors are still repeated today in nearly the same words.

Why do you think a rumor survives decades after a clear answer is published? Part Eight takes up that question.

All seventeen verdicts

#	Claim	Verdict
1	Oswald acted alone	Inconclusive
2	A shot came from the grassy knoll	Inconclusive (the fatal shot from the knoll: False)
3	The CIA killed Kennedy	False (debunked)
4	The Mafia killed Kennedy	Inconclusive
5	Cuba or the Soviet Union was behind it	False (debunked)
6	Lyndon Johnson was behind it	False (debunked)
7	Oswald was a CIA or FBI	False (debunked)

645-646, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 647, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 651, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 659, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 660, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 662, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/appendix-12.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[709] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 54-55, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 185, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 225, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

#	Claim	Verdict
	agent or informant	
8	The magic bullet is impossible	False (debunked)
9	The government is still hiding the truth in withheld files	Partly true
10	The Warren Commission was a cover-up	Partly true
11	The Zapruder film was altered	Inconclusive (no official finding of alteration)
12	Kennedy's body or the autopsy evidence was altered	False (debunked), record incomplete
13	Dozens of witnesses died mysteriously	Inconclusive (not tested in the report texts reviewed)
14	A Secret Service agent fired the fatal shot by accident	False (debunked)
15	Kennedy was killed to stop him leaving Vietnam	False (debunked)
16	The 2025 releases proved a conspiracy / showed nothing new	False (debunked) / Partly true
17	Jack Ruby killed Oswald to silence him	Inconclusive

Table sources: the verdict tables in Chapters 17 and 18. Verdicts as of November 12, 2026.

Notice the pattern. None of the seventeen claims came out simply True. The claims about specific plotters mostly fail. The claims about secrecy and cover-up are partly true. And the claims about whether anyone helped Oswald or Ruby stay open.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** The HSCA authenticated the autopsy photographs and X-rays. Bullet fragments from the head shot were matched to Oswald's rifle. Classified

withholding of the collection ended in 2025, with some records still withheld for legal reasons.[710]

- **Interpretation:** The verdicts in this chapter are my judgments, based on the sources listed with each one.
- **Unknown:** What the Kodak authenticity study of the Zapruder film concluded, and whether an official study ever tested the witness-deaths claim. I could not verify either for this edition.

[710] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 42-43, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 50, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

Part Eight: Belief and Doubt

The last part of this book turns from the evidence to the people looking at it. Why do most Americans doubt the official answer, and what, if anything, would change that?

Chapter 19: What Americans Believe

Polling figures in this chapter are the most recent I could verify as of November 12, 2026. The latest Gallup survey on this question that I found was taken in October 2023.

Six decades of doubt

Gallup has asked Americans about the assassination many times since 1963. Here is the trend, using the numbers Gallup published with its 2023 survey:

Survey date	One man responsible	Others involved	No opinion
November 1963	29%	52%	19%
December 1966	36%	50%	15%
December 1976	11%	81%	9%
October 1983	11%	74%	15%
February 1992	10%	77%	13%
November 1993	15%	75%	10%
March 2001	13%	81%	6%
November 2003	19%	75%	6%
November 2013	30%	61%	10%
October 2023	29%	65%	6%

Table source: Gallup topline results for the October 2-23, 2023 survey, published November 13, 2023. Some rows do not add to 100 percent because of rounding. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[711]

A caution about this table: Gallup did not use exactly the same question every year. In 1963, it asked whether "the man who shot President Kennedy acted on his own, or was some group or element also responsible." In 1983 and 1992, the question named "one man, Lee Harvey Oswald." In 2013 and 2023, it asked whether "one man was responsible for the

[711] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

assassination of President Kennedy, or do you think that others were involved in a conspiracy?"[712] Small changes in wording can move results, so the trend is a rough guide.

Notice three things:

- **Doubt was a majority view from the start.** Even in the week after Dallas, before the Warren Commission existed, 52 percent thought others were involved.
- **Doubt peaked in 1976.** That was the year after the Zapruder film was shown on national television and the Church Committee revealed the Castro plots (Chapter 12).
- **Doubt has eased somewhat since 2001,** though it is still a large majority. Gallup's 2013 figure of 61 percent was the lowest since 1966.[713]

Who doubts

In 2023, doubt crossed party lines. Gallup's numbers:[714]

Group	One man responsible	Others involved
Republicans	25%	71%
Independents	25%	68%
Democrats	39%	55%
Postgraduate degree	50%	44%
No college degree	20%	73%

Table source: Gallup, October 2023 survey. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[715]

Two points stand out. Belief in a conspiracy is a majority in all three party groups. And education matters more than party: people with postgraduate degrees were the only group in this table where a plurality said one man was responsible.

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[712] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[713] Art Swift, "Majority in U.S. Still Believe JFK Killed in a Conspiracy," Gallup, November 15, 2013, https://news.gallup.com/poll/165893/majority-believe-jfk-killed-conspiracy.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026.

[714] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[715] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

Who do they think did it?

In 2023, Gallup asked the people who believed in a conspiracy an open-ended question: "Just your best guess, what other specific people or groups were involved" in the assassination? Here are the most common answers, compared with 2013:[716]

Answer	2013	2023
U.S. government	13%	20%
CIA	7%	16%
Mafia or organized crime	13%	11%
FBI or J. Edgar Hoover	1%	6%
Castro or Cuba	5%	3%
Lyndon Johnson	3%	2%
Soviet Union	3%	2%
No opinion	40%	39%

Table source: Gallup topline, October 2023 survey, question asked of those who believed others were involved. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[717]

The biggest change from 2013 to 2023 is the rise in people naming the U.S. government or one of its agencies. Gallup reported that 38 percent of conspiracy believers named the government or an agency in 2023, up 13 points from 2013.[718]

An older Gallup survey asked the question a different way, by naming possible groups and asking whether each was involved. In 2003, 37 percent said the Mafia was involved, 34 percent the CIA, 18 percent Lyndon Johnson, 15 percent Cuban leaders and 15 percent the Soviet Union.[719] Those numbers are higher than the open-ended answers above, because naming a group for people tends to produce more yes answers than asking them to come up with a name themselves.

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[716] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[717] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[718] Megan Brenan, "Decades Later, Most Americans Doubt Lone Gunman Killed JFK," Gallup, November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/514310/decades-later-americans-doubt-lone-gunman-killed-jfk.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026.

[719] Lydia Saad, "Americans: Kennedy Assassination a Conspiracy," Gallup, November 21, 2003, https://news.gallup.com/poll/9751/americans-kennedy-assassination-conspiracy.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026.

How belief lines up with the record

Put the polls next to Part Seven's verdicts:

What many Americans believe	What the records show
Others were involved	Inconclusive; the HSCA said probably, based mainly on disputed acoustics, and could not identify anyone
The U.S. government or CIA was involved	False on the record; the agencies hid information but no investigation found they took part
The Mafia was involved	Inconclusive; the HSCA left individual mob figures open
Johnson was involved	False on the record; no evidence found

Table sources: Chapter 17 verdicts; Gallup, 2023. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[720]

What the polls can and cannot tell us

Polls are useful, but it is easy to ask them to do too much. Here is how I read them.

They measure belief, not evidence. A poll tells you what people think happened. It cannot tell you what happened. Sixty-five percent of Americans believing in a conspiracy is a fact about Americans, not a fact about Dallas. The reverse is also true: if most people believed Oswald acted alone, that would not settle the question either.

They are sensitive to wording. As noted above, Gallup's question changed over the years, and the 2003 named-groups survey produced much higher numbers than the 2023 open-ended one. When you see a poll quoted, look for the exact question.[721]

"Others were involved" covers a lot of ground. A person who thinks Oswald had one friend who knew in advance and a person who thinks the CIA planned the whole thing both answer "others were involved." The open-ended follow-up question shows how scattered

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[720] Megan Brenan, "Decades Later, Most Americans Doubt Lone Gunman Killed JFK," Gallup, November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/514310/decades-later-americans-doubt-lone-gunman-killed-jfk.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026; Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[721] Lydia Saad, "Americans: Kennedy Assassination a Conspiracy," Gallup, November 21, 2003, https://news.gallup.com/poll/9751/americans-kennedy-assassination-conspiracy.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026; Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

those answers are, and that close to 4 in 10 conspiracy believers in 2023 did not name anyone.[722]

They do not show why people changed their minds. The trend table shows when doubt rose and fell. It does not show what caused the change. When I link the 1976 peak to the Zapruder film and the Church Committee, that is my interpretation of the timing, not something the polls themselves measured.

So what can the polls tell us? They show that doubt is broad, lasting and shared across parties. They show that it has shifted from "someone else" toward "the government." And they show that a large share of Americans hold a view about this case that the official investigations, taken together, do not fully support. That gap is what Chapter 20 tries to explain.

The poll answer that is furthest from the record, government involvement, is also the one that has grown fastest. Why might that be? The next chapter offers some answers.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** In October 2023, Gallup found 65 percent of U.S. adults believed others were involved and 29 percent believed one man was responsible. Majorities of Republicans, independents and Democrats believed in a conspiracy.[723]
- **Interpretation:** The 1976 peak in doubt followed the public showing of the Zapruder film and the Church Committee revelations. That timing is a matter of record, but the link between them is my interpretation.[724]
- **Unknown:** Whether the 2025 releases changed public opinion. I found no Gallup survey on this question after October 2023.

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[722] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[723] Megan Brenan, "Decades Later, Most Americans Doubt Lone Gunman Killed JFK," Gallup, November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/514310/decades-later-americans-doubt-lone-gunman-killed-jfk.aspx, accessed November 12, 2026; Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[724] Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Chapter 20: Why the Doubt Lasts, and What Would Settle It

This chapter reflects the record as of November 12, 2026.

In the Introduction, I asked you a question: what would it take to change your mind about this case? This last chapter comes back to it. First, I want to suggest some reasons the doubt has lasted so long. These are my interpretations, drawn from the record covered in this book. Then I will look at what evidence, if any, could still settle the open questions.

Reason 1: The case never had a trial

Oswald was killed two days after the assassination.[725] There was no courtroom test of the evidence, no defense lawyer, and no jury verdict. The Warren Commission was a fact-finding body, not a court. Many people trust a verdict reached through argument more than a conclusion written by a government panel. The Review Board itself said the murder of Oswald by Ruby "caused further skepticism as it suggested both a conspiracy and a cover-up."[726]

Reason 2: The government did hide things

This is not paranoia. It is in the record. The CIA and FBI kept the Castro plots from the Warren Commission. The FBI destroyed a note Oswald left for an agent, and hid that it had disciplined 17 employees. A CIA historian later described the Director's conduct as, in news reports' words, a "benign cover up."[727]

Once people learn that officials hid some things, it is reasonable for them to wonder what else was hidden. The Review Board put it this way: "The suspicions created by government secrecy eroded confidence in the truthfulness of federal agencies in general and damaged their credibility."[728]

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[725] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[726] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[727] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 9-10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 95-97, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; Shawn Price, "CIA Director Withheld Information About JFK Assassination," UPI, October 13, 2015, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2015/10/13/CIA-director-withheld-information-about-JFK-assassination/4701444710907/, accessed November 12, 2026.

[728] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Reason 3: The official investigations disagreed

The Warren Commission said Oswald acted alone. The HSCA said there was probably a conspiracy. When two official bodies disagree, people can pick the one that fits what they already believe. And the HSCA's conspiracy finding rested on acoustics evidence that its own lead expert first put at 50 percent and a later review rejected.[729] So the public got a headline that sounded settled, built on evidence that was not.

Reason 4: The film

Most people never read the reports. But tens of millions have seen the Zapruder film. The backward motion of the President's head looks, to most viewers, like a shot from the front. The HSCA offered an expert explanation for it, but an explanation in a report is weaker than an image in your memory.[730]

Reason 5: The record really is incomplete in places

Some of the doubt rests on real gaps:

- The autopsy record was handled poorly, and the lead autopsy doctor destroyed his notes and first draft.[731]
- The Soviet KGB's files on Oswald have never been opened to U.S. investigators.[732]
- The HSCA could not rule out that individual organized crime figures were involved, and could not say who, if anyone, helped Ruby get into the police basement.[733]

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[729] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 72, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1b.html, accessed November 12, 2026; National Research Council, Committee on Ballistic Acoustics, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1982), DOI 10.17226/10264, https://doi.org/10.17226/10264, link not opened during research (full text not opened; conclusions taken from the publisher's summary and secondary descriptions).

[730] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 41, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 43-44, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[731] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[732] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 103, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[733] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 157, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Gaps like these do not prove anything. But they leave room, and people fill room with theories.

Reason 6: The size of the event

This is the most speculative point here, and I label it as my own view. Many people feel that a lone, unhappy young man with a mail-order rifle is too small a cause for an event that changed the country. A large event seems to call for a large cause. That feeling is understandable, but it is a feeling about proportion, not evidence about Dallas.

What would settle it?

Here is my honest assessment of what new evidence could still change the picture, and how likely each is.

Possible new evidence	What it could settle	How likely, in my judgment
Soviet KGB files on Oswald	What Soviet intelligence knew about Oswald, including any interview with him	Unknown; the Review Board's efforts failed
Cuban government files	Whether Cuba knew anything of Oswald's plans after his Mexico City visit	Unknown; the Review Board's efforts failed
A credible new scientific test of the police recording	Whether there was a fourth shot	Possible, but the recording has already been studied for decades
A first-hand witness or document showing someone helped Oswald or Ruby	The open conspiracy questions	Low; most people involved have died
The remaining withheld U.S. records (grand jury, tax and private donor material)	Minor details	Low; the records still withheld are narrow and mostly legal

Table sources: my judgments, based on ARRB Final Report, Executive Summary; HSCA report, pages 1-2 and 103; NARA 2025 release page. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[734]

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[734] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition,

What the records show, in one page

If you take away one page from this book, take away this one.

Confirmed by the record:

- Lee Harvey Oswald fired the shots that struck President Kennedy and Governor Connally, from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository, with a rifle he had ordered under a false name. Both main investigations agreed.[735]
- Oswald killed Officer J. D. Tippit about 45 minutes later.[736]
- Jack Ruby killed Oswald two days later.[737]
- The CIA and FBI kept important information from the Warren Commission.[738]
- The autopsy record was handled poorly and is incomplete.[739]
- Almost all of the records are now public.[740]

Still open:

- Whether anyone else helped Oswald, knew in advance, or fired as well.
- Whether anyone helped Ruby get into the basement, and why he did what he did.
- What Soviet and Cuban files would show.

Not supported by the record:

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https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 103, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[735] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 19, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[736] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 20, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[737] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[738] Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026.

[739] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 6, part II, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

[740] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2017-2018 Additional Documents Release", https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2017-2018, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

- That the CIA, FBI, Secret Service, Lyndon Johnson, the Soviet government or the Cuban government took part.
- That the single bullet path was impossible.
- That the fatal shot came from the grassy knoll.

A checklist for the next claim you hear

New claims about this case appear every year, and more will follow each release of records. Here is the short checklist I used while writing this book. You can use it on any claim, including mine.

1. **What exactly is the claim?** Write it in one sentence. Many claims change shape when you pin them down. "A shot came from the knoll" and "the fatal shot came from the knoll" are different claims with different verdicts (Chapter 17).
2. **What is the source?** Is it a record, an investigation's finding, a scientist's paper, a news report, or someone with a side to argue? Use the five tiers in the Introduction.
3. **Can you see the original?** A quote from a document should lead you to the document. If a claim cites a record number, search for it on the National Archives release pages (Appendix C).
4. **Is it first-hand?** Who saw, heard or wrote it, and when? A memory recorded in 1963 and a memory first told in 1990 are not equal.
5. **Did a later investigation look at the same question?** Many 1964 findings were retested in 1979, and some 1979 findings were questioned in 1982 and later. Always check the date.
6. **Does it explain the physical evidence?** Any theory has to deal with the rifle, the bullet fragments, the autopsy materials and the films. A theory that ignores them is incomplete.
7. **Is "hidden" being used as proof?** It is true that the agencies hid things (Chapter 15). It does not follow that whatever was hidden supports a given theory. A gap in the record is a reason to look, not a finding.
8. **Would the claim's supporters accept the same kind of evidence against it?** If a single witness is enough to prove a claim, then a single witness should be enough to question it.

None of these steps tells you what to believe. They tell you how sure you are entitled to be.

Back to your answer

At the start of this book, I asked what it would take to change your mind. If you came in sure that Oswald acted alone, I hope the chapters on the CIA, the FBI and Ruby gave you reasons to hold that view a little more loosely. If you came in sure there was a conspiracy, I hope the chapters on the rifle, the medical evidence and the acoustics gave you reasons to ask for more proof than you had before.

Either way, the records are there for you to read. Appendix C explains how. You do not have to take my word, or anyone's.

What is confirmed, what is interpretation, what is unknown

- **Confirmed fact:** Oswald was killed before trial. The agencies withheld information from the Warren Commission. The two main investigations disagreed on conspiracy.[741]
- **Interpretation:** The six reasons for lasting doubt in this chapter are my own reading of the record, supported where noted by the Review Board's comments on secrecy.[742]
- **Unknown:** Whether any new evidence will ever settle the open questions.

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[741] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), p. 17, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF p. 10, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), pp. 1-2, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/summary.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

[742] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), Executive Summary, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026.

Appendix A: Timeline, 1939 to 2026

Current as of November 12, 2026.

Date	Event	Source
October 18, 1939	Lee Harvey Oswald born in New Orleans	Warren Report, p. 9
October 1956	Oswald enlists in the Marine Corps	Warren Report, p. 11
September 11, 1959	Oswald released early from active Marine service	Warren Report, p. 11
October 16, 1959	Oswald arrives in Moscow and asks for Soviet citizenship	Warren Report, p. 12
Late 1959	FBI opens a security file on Oswald	Church Committee Book V, PDF p. 9
1960 to early 1963	CIA attempts to use underworld figures to assassinate Fidel Castro	Church Committee Book V, PDF p. 8
April 30, 1961	Oswald marries Marina Prusakova in Minsk	Warren Report, p. 12
June 1, 1962	The Oswalds leave Moscow for the United States	Warren Report, p. 13
March 1963	Rifle ordered by mail under the name "A. Hidell"	Warren Report, pp. 16 and 119
April 10, 1963	Shot fired at General Edwin Walker's home in Dallas	Warren Report, pp. 13-14
August 9, 1963	Oswald arrested after a street scuffle in New Orleans	Warren Report, p. 14
September 27 to October 3, 1963	Oswald in Mexico City; visits Cuban and Soviet offices	Warren Report, p. 14
October 29, 1963	CIA official meets AMLASH, says the U.S. would support	Church Committee Book V, PDF pp. 8-9

Date	Event	Source
	a coup in Cuba	
November 22, 1963, 12:30 p.m.	President Kennedy shot in Dealey Plaza	Warren Report, p. 48
November 22, 1963, about 1:00 p.m.	President Kennedy pronounced dead	Warren Report, p. 55
November 22, 1963, about 1:15 p.m.	Officer J. D. Tippit shot	Warren Report, p. 6
November 22, 1963, 2:38 p.m.	Lyndon B. Johnson sworn in as President	Warren Report, p. 58
November 24, 1963	Jack Ruby shoots Oswald; Oswald dies at 1:07 p.m.	Warren Report, p. 17
November 29, 1963	Executive Order 11130 creates the Warren Commission	Warren Report, p. ix
March 14, 1964	Ruby convicted of murder	Warren Report, p. 18
September 24, 1964	Warren Commission delivers its report	Warren Commission letter of transmittal
October 1966	Texas appeals court reverses Ruby's conviction	ARRB Final Report, ch. 1
January 3, 1967	Ruby dies before his new trial	ARRB Final Report, ch. 1; Wikipedia, "Jack Ruby"
1967	Jim Garrison charges Clay Shaw; David Ferrie dies within days of being named	ARRB Final Report, ch. 1; HSCA report, p. 142
1968	Clark Panel reviews autopsy photos and X-rays	HSCA report, p. 42
1969	Clay Shaw acquitted	HSCA report, p. 142
February 1975	Rockefeller Commission views the Zapruder film; the film is shown on national television soon after	ARRB Final Report, ch. 1

Date	Event	Source
October 1975	FBI publicly discloses the destroyed Oswald note	Church Committee Book V, PDF p. 94
April 1976	Church Committee Book V issued (released June 1976)	HSCA report, p. 9
September 1976	House creates the HSCA	HSCA report, p. 9
August 20, 1978	HSCA acoustics test firings in Dealey Plaza	HSCA report, p. 69
December 29, 1978	HSCA adopts its findings	HSCA report, p. 491
1979	HSCA final report published	HSCA report
1982	National Research Council acoustics review published	National Research Council, 1982
October 26, 1992	JFK Records Act becomes law	Public Law 102-526
1994 to 1998	Assassination Records Review Board at work	ARRB Final Report
August 3, 1999	Arbitration panel awards Zapruder heirs $16 million for the original film	Department of Justice, 1999
2017 to 2018	Seven National Archives releases under the JFK Act's 2017 deadline	NARA 2017-2018 release page
2021 to 2023	Further releases under presidential memoranda	NARA 2021, 2022 and 2023 release pages
January 23, 2025	Executive Order 14176 signed	NARA collection page
March 18 to April 3, 2025	Five releases totaling 83,621 pages	NARA 2025 release page
January 30, 2026	Release of 11,022 pages	NARA 2025 release page

Table sources: as listed in each row, cited in full in the chapters where each event is discussed. Table current as of November 12, 2026.[743]

A note on Ruby's death: the Review Board says he died three months after the October 1966 reversal. The exact date, January 3, 1967, comes from a secondary source, not from the official reports.[744]

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[743] Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 9-18, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-1.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Warren Commission, *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964), pp. 48-58, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-2.html, accessed November 12, 2026; Church Committee, *Final Report, Book V* (April 23, 1976), PDF pp. 8-9, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 9, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/intro.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 42, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1a.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 142, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[744] ARRB, *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (1998), chapter 1, https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt, accessed November 12, 2026; Wikipedia, "Jack Ruby" (online encyclopedia article; used only for the date and cause of Ruby's death), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Ruby, accessed November 12, 2026.

Appendix B: Key People

People are listed with the role that matters in this book and the chapters where they appear.

Person	Role	Chapters
Aschkenasy, Ernest	Acoustics researcher, Queens College, for the HSCA	14
Barger, James E.	Chief scientist, Bolt Beranek and Newman; HSCA acoustics expert	14
Blakey, G. Robert	HSCA chief counsel and staff director from June 1977	13
Brennan, Howard	Witness who saw a gunman in the sixth-floor window	8
Clark, Ramsey	Attorney General who appointed the 1968 medical panel	11, 12
Clark, William Kemp	Parkland Hospital doctor who observed the head wound	11
Connally, John	Governor of Texas, wounded in the motorcade	9, 10
Day, J. C.	Dallas police lieutenant who lifted the palmprint from the rifle	8
Dodd, Christopher J.	HSCA member who dissented on the shot timing	9, 13
Dulles, Allen W.	Former CIA Director and Warren Commission member	7, 15
Edgar, Robert W.	HSCA member who criticized the acoustics vote	13, 14
Ferrie, David W.	New Orleans anti-Castro activist named by Garrison	5, 12

Person	Role	Chapters
FitzGerald, Desmond	CIA official who met AMLASH in October 1963	15
Ford, Gerald R.	Warren Commission member, later President	7, 12
Frazier, Buell Wesley	Coworker who drove Oswald to work on November 22	8
Garrison, Jim	New Orleans District Attorney who prosecuted Clay Shaw	12
Helms, Richard	Senior CIA official during the Warren Commission's work	15
Hickey, George W., Jr.	Secret Service agent in the follow-up car	18
Hoover, J. Edgar	FBI Director	5, 15
Hosty, James P., Jr.	FBI agent assigned to the Oswald case in Dallas	5, 15
Humes, James J.	Lead autopsy doctor	11
Johnson, Lyndon B.	Vice President, then President	1, 7, 17
Marcello, Carlos	Louisiana organized crime leader examined by the HSCA	17
McCone, John	CIA Director in 1963 and 1964	15
McLain, H. B.	Dallas police motorcycle officer linked by the HSCA to the radio recording	14
Oswald, Lee Harvey	Accused assassin	Throughout
Oswald, Marina	Oswald's wife	4, 5
Paine, Ruth	Friend of Marina Oswald; the rifle was kept in her	4, 5

Person	Role	Chapters
	garage	
Randle, Linnie Mae	Frazier's sister, who saw Oswald's package	8
Rankin, J. Lee	Warren Commission general counsel	7
Robarge, David	CIA historian who wrote about McCone	15
Ruby, Jack	Dallas nightclub owner who killed Oswald	3, 6, 18
Shaw, Clay L.	New Orleans businessman tried and acquitted in 1969	12
Spencer, Saundra	Former Naval Photographic Center employee deposed by the Review Board	11, 18
Stokes, Louis	HSCA chairman from March 1977	13
Tippit, J. D.	Dallas police officer killed on November 22	2, 3
Trafficante, Santos	Florida organized crime leader examined by the HSCA	6, 17
Walker, Edwin A.	Retired general shot at in April 1963	4
Warren, Earl	Chief Justice and Commission chairman	7
Wecht, Cyril H.	HSCA medical panel member and consistent dissenter	10, 11
Weiss, Mark	Queens College acoustics professor for the HSCA	14
Zapruder, Abraham	Dallas clothing manufacturer	11

Person	Role	Chapters
	who filmed the shooting	

Table sources: the chapters listed. The HSCA described Trafficante as "the La Cosa Nostra leader in Florida" and Marcello as "the head of the organized crime network in Louisiana." Table current as of November 12, 2026.[745]

[745] HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 143, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026; HSCA, *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations* (1979), p. 172, National Archives online edition, https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html, accessed November 12, 2026.

Appendix C: How to Search the Records Yourself

Web addresses below were checked on November 12, 2026.

You can read nearly everything this book relies on for free. Here is where to start.

The National Archives JFK collection. The main page is https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk. From there you can reach:

- The full text of the Warren Commission report, the HSCA report and the Review Board's final report.
- The release pages for 2017-2018, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2025, each with a table of the documents released and links to the files.

Record numbers. Most documents in the collection carry a Record Identification Form, or RIF, number, such as 104-10414-10124. The first three digits show the agency that created the record. On the release pages, the file name of each document includes its RIF number, so you can search the page for a number you have seen cited. Records the FBI transferred in 2025 do not have RIF numbers; the Archives says they are in the National Archives Catalog instead.[746]

The National Archives Catalog. The catalog at https://catalog.archives.gov lets you search by keyword across the digitized records.

The Church Committee report. Book V of the Senate committee's final report is posted by the Senate Intelligence Committee at https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf.

In person. The Archives says records that are not yet digitized can be seen at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.[747]

Questions. The Archives' 2025 release page lists the email address jfkrecords@nara.gov for questions about the records.[748]

Four tips from my own research:

1. **Read the report, not a summary of it.** Many claims in this book's Part Seven fall apart, or get stronger, when you read the exact wording.

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[746] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[747] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

[748] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

2. **Check the page.** The online texts are scanned and sometimes contain errors. This book notes several, such as a frame number printed as "813" when 313 or 312 is meant (Chapter 9).

3. **Watch the date.** A finding from 1964 may have been tested again in 1979. Always ask whether a later investigation looked at the same question.

4. **Write down four things for every released document.** Note its record number, who wrote it, the date it was written and the date it was released. The release date matters: a document posted in 2025 may have been written in 1963, and the National Archives releasing a file does not mean the government agrees with everything in it. A released document shows what one office recorded or believed at the time, nothing more.[749]

[749] NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2025 Documents Release" (page last reviewed January 30, 2026), https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2025, accessed November 12, 2026.

Appendix D: Bibliography by Tier

Every source cited in this book is listed here by tier. Links were checked on November 12, 2026, unless the entry says the link could not be opened.

Tier 1: Primary and official records

- Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), *Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board* (Washington, DC: September 1998). https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.txt
- NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2023 Additional Documents Release". https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2023.
- NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2022 Additional Documents Release". https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2022.
- NARA, "JFK Assassination Records - 2021 Additional Documents Release". https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/release-2021.
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- U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), *Final Report, Book V: The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies*, S. Rept. 94-755, April 23, 1976. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_V.pdf
- Warren Commission, title page, members and letter of transmittal to President Johnson, September 24, 1964, in *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (1964). https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/letter.html.

Tier 2: Nonpartisan analysis and polling

- Art Swift, "Majority in U.S. Still Believe JFK Killed in a Conspiracy," Gallup, November 15, 2013. https://news.gallup.com/poll/165893/majority-believe-jfk-killed-conspiracy.aspx.
- Gallup, "JFK Assassination" topline results, survey of October 2-23, 2023 (PDF), November 13, 2023. https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/544358/2023_11_13%20JFK.pdf.
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- Megan Brenan, "Decades Later, Most Americans Doubt Lone Gunman Killed JFK," Gallup, November 13, 2023. https://news.gallup.com/poll/514310/decades-later-americans-doubt-lone-gunman-killed-jfk.aspx.
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Tier 3: Scholarly and scientific work

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Tier 4: Journalism and fact-checks

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Tier 5: Advocacy (labeled as such)

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