



50th Anniversary of JFK Assassination Spawns Attacks on Dallas “Right-wingers”

As the nation pauses to reflect on the tragic assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, the respectful and civil recollection of this horrific act is already being marred by those who seek to politicize Kennedy’s killing to serve their own agenda.

With the passage of 50 years’ time, it becomes more and more doubtful that we will ever learn the entire truth behind the assassination. However, since some members of the media have already started to rearrange the events of 50 years ago to divert blame from a self-described Marxist — Lee Harvey Oswald — onto those they like to label as (variously) “ultra-conservative,” “archconservative,” or simply “right-wing,” a sane and sober look at these claims is definitely called for.



Crowing Claimant

Leading the charge against the “ultra-conservatives” is Scott K. Parks, who penned an article for the *Dallas News* for October 12 headlined: “Extremists in Dallas created volatile atmosphere before JFK’s 1963 visit.” Parks lamented that following November 22, 1963, “Dallas became known to the world as the city of hate, the city that killed Kennedy.”

Parks proceeded to assign blame for exactly who was responsible for manufacturing this “hateful” atmosphere in Dallas, and — lest anyone miss his point — his explanation falls under a subheading, “John Birch Society HQ.”

Moving on to name names, Parks named Texas oilmen H.L. Hunt and Clint Murchison and General Edwin Walker as among the powerful and influential Dallasites who disliked John Kennedy’s policies and — by a very long stretch of logic — shared in the blame for Kennedy’s murder. Walker comes under special scrutiny in the hit piece because of his membership in The John Birch Society. Oddly, though Parks noted that Lee Harvey Oswald attempted to kill Walker on April 10, 1963, and also that Oswald’s widow, Marina, said Oswald had once told her that Walker was a leader of a “fascist organization” (typical communist labeling for anti-communists), he fails to see the incongruity between his assertions that “right-wingers” contributed to Kennedy’s assassination and the fact that an admitted Marxist shot the president. He either experiences or feigns puzzlement by writing: “[Marina Oswald] could offer no logical explanation for why Lee Oswald, an avowed leftist, would target the right-wing extremist Walker and the president, who was despised by so many on the far right.”

In his article, Parks relates how General Walker, after he learned of UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson’s



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visit to Dallas to deliver a speech commemorating United Nations Day, scheduled a United States Day at the same auditorium one day earlier. Walker's obvious intent was to emphasize U.S. sovereignty over the threat to that sovereignty that U.S. membership in the UN constituted.

The following day, during Stevenson's UN address, a heckler shouted at the ambassador through a bullhorn. After the speech, outside the auditorium a small crowd of 100 protesters surrounded the ambassador and things got ugly. One man reportedly spat at him and a woman, who later claimed she was pushed, conked him over the head with her protest sign — inexcusable behavior to say the least.

But any claim that General Walker and the overwhelming majority of peaceful citizens who agreed with his views on the UN were somehow responsible for this rowdy behavior is as illogical as the belief that crowing roosters cause sunrises!

Interestingly, Parks was critical of his own newspaper's influence on the Dallas political landscape when he wrote: "In the early 1960s, the opinion pages of *The Dallas Morning News* reflected the anti-Kennedy views of the newspaper's publisher, E.M. 'Ted' Dealey."

The implication, of course, is that Dealey's "anti-Kennedy" views somehow contributed to the assassination of the president. Perhaps Parks' view of Dealey as a contributor to "right-wing extremism" might be altered if he knew that Dealey wrote many of the *Dallas Morning News's* anti-Ku Klux Klan editorials during the paper's crusade against the Klan from 1920 to 1924. In a 1924 memo to his father, *News* founder George Dealey, he insisted that the paper endorse candidate Miriam Ferguson over the Klan's favored gubernatorial candidate, George C. Butte.

The *Dallas Morning News* published an editorial on November 22, 1963 that expressed hope that the president's visit to Dallas might help "Democrats, Republicans and Independents unite today in a genuineness of welcome and cordiality." It also published a paid ad that was critical of Kennedy's policies. Parks referred to this contrast as an example of the paper playing "good cop, bad cop," but there is nothing at all unusual about the advertising content of a newspaper being at odds with the paper's editorial stance.

About That Ad

The ad that has generated so much controversy, after the fact, was comprised of a list of 12 questions asking the president why he initiated as many policies. The questions were critical of many of the Kennedy administration's policies, including our sale of wheat to Communist North Vietnam, the administration's welcoming of Yugoslavian communist dictator Josip Broz Tito, the administration's recognition of several communist Eastern European governments while simultaneously abandoning anti-communist freedom fighters, and the banning of the House Committee on Un-American Activities film, *Operation Abolition*, from U.S. military bases.

Considering the fanfare raised about this ad after the Kennedy assassination, one would think that the ad had consisted of a series of personal attacks against the president, in other words character assassination that had fueled the physical assassination. Nothing could be further from the truth, as the ad's objections were limited solely to administration *policies*.

The ad demanded answers to the questions, something many a reporter has asked for at presidential press conferences.

Parks, in a sophomoric attempt to implicate the newspaper ad in the Kennedy assassination, noted that it was "framed by a funereal black border." How "funereal black" can be differentiated from other



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shades of “black” he did not explain. But apparently seeing a connection between the ad and the assassination, he went on to name names: “Warren Commission investigators later determined that Joseph P. Grinnan, an oil broker and local leader of the John Birch Society, had paid for the ad with ‘around \$1,500’ donated by three men: H. R. ‘Bum’ Bright, an oil man who later became owner of the Dallas Cowboys; Nelson Bunker Hunt, a son of H.L. Hunt; and Edgar Crissey, an insurance company executive.” By such logic, the Dallas Cowboys must share responsibility for creating a climate unfavorable to Kennedy in Dallas!

Would those who attempt to make the connection between the ad and the killing have us believe that Lee Harvey Oswald read the *Dallas Morning News* on the morning of November 22, 1963 and saw the ad with its “funereal black” border, and then the thought of killing the president suddenly popped into his head? (In fact, Oswald had asked a friend for a ride to Irving the day before, to pick up the infamous package of “curtain rods” that contained his Carcano rifle.)

Far from being a sympathizer of the “right wing,” Oswald had visited both the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City in September 1963 in an attempt to obtain visas to visit both communist countries. A mere 11 days before the assassination, Oswald wrote from Dallas to the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C.: “Had I been able to reach the Soviet Embassy in Havana, as planned, the embassy there would have had time to complete our business.”

Despite these clear-cut indications that Oswald was enamored of the Soviet system, revisionists are still trying to make the case, 50 years after the Kennedy assassination, that the “extreme right” was the real culprit.

Parks reflected on the large crowds of cheering, waving people that lined the presidential parade route on November 22, 1963 and noted: “The atmosphere contradicted the image of Dallas as a city that hated the president.”

A Lone Journalist?

But Parks is not alone in his attempt to cast blame on the right wing, in general, and The John Birch Society, in particular, for creating the “atmosphere” that led to the assassination. Two articles in the *New Yorker*, “The John Birchers’ Tea Party,” published on October 11, and “Leaving Dealey Plaza,” on October 15, promote the same line. In the former, Adam Gopnik asserts:

In their new book, *Dallas 1963*, Bill Minutaglio and Steven L. Davis demonstrate in luxuriant detail just how clotted Dallas was with right-wing types in the period before Kennedy’s fatal visit. The John Birch Society, the paranoid, well-heeled, anti-Communist group, was the engine of the movement then, as the Tea Party is now — and though, to their great credit, the saner conservatives worked hard to keep it out of the official center, the society remained hyper-present.

In the latter, George Packer offers more of the same, also writing about *Dallas 1963*:

The authors describe the potent brew of right-wing passions, much of it well organized and well funded — Bircher anti-Communism, anti-Catholicism, racism (Dallas was the last large American city to desegregate its schools), Kennedy hatred — that suffused many people in Dallas with the spirit of dissension and incipient violence during the early sixties, including some of its leading citizens: elected officials, Baptist ministers, the billionaire oilman H. L. Hunt, the right-wing zealot General Edwin Walker, even the publisher of the *Morning News*, Ted Dealey....

Oswald was an avowed Marxist, which might seem to absolve the city’s right wing of any responsibility.



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But *Dallas 1963* places the assassin in context as a malleable, unstable figure breathing the city's extraordinarily feverish air.

The image of Dallas' "extraordinarily feverish air" has been created by those who attempted to associate political disagreement with "hate." However, those who disagree, politically, have often formed real friendships. A prime example is the friendship that existed between senators John Kennedy and Barry Goldwater, when both served together in the Senate.

If a right-winger such as Goldwater and a "liberal" such as Kennedy could have shared in mutual friendship and respect, it was not at all beyond belief that the residents of Dallas in 1963, even those who disagreed with Kennedy's policies, might have liked the man, personally. To suggest that those who exercised their freedom of speech to disapprove of Kennedy's policies were "haters" responsible for his assassination is to discredit not only the people of Dallas, but conservatives everywhere.

In Chapter 7, "Lee Harvey Oswald: Background and Possible Motives," of the *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (the Warren Commission Report), we find:

It has been suggested that one of the motivating influences operating on Lee Oswald was *the atmosphere in the city of Dallas, especially an atmosphere of extreme opposition to President Kennedy* that was present in some parts of the Dallas community and which received publicity there prior to the assassination.⁴⁰³ Some of that feeling was expressed in the incident involving then vice-presidential candidate Johnson during the 1960 campaign, in the treatment of Ambassador Adlai Stevenson late in October of 1963 and in the *extreme anti-Kennedy newspaper advertisement* and handbills that appeared in Dallas at the time of the President's visit there.⁴⁰⁴ [Emphasis added.]

The Commission has found no evidence that the extreme views expressed toward President Kennedy by some rightwing groups centered in Dallas or any other general atmosphere of hate or rightwing extremism which may have existed in the city of Dallas had any connection with Oswald's actions on November 22, 1963.

So while the Warren Report did fall into the trap of lumping together "hate" and "rightwing extremism," as if the terms went together as naturally as pie and ice cream, unlike some of today's newspaper writers, it found no evidence that the "atmosphere" in Dallas — by whatever label — had any influence on Oswald.

As the nation commemorates a tragic day in our history, those who continue to cast unfounded blame on the city of Dallas and "the right wing" do a disservice to many good Americans. A more fitting remembrance of Kennedy's life and death would be to lament that a president, despite whatever political failings he might have had, was senselessly struck down in a manner abhorrent to all God-fearing Americans — conservative or otherwise — who cherish the rule of law.

— Photo of President Kennedy's casket in the Rotunda on Capitol Hill: AP Images

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