

INTERVIEW FOR CARBDONDALE NIGHTLIFE, CARBONDALE, ILLINOIS

QUESTIONS BY BRIAN WILSON WITH ANSWERS FROM JOSEPH McBRIDE, OCTOBER 21, 2013

1) You began writing on film in 1967, and were one of the young scholars championing and legitimizing the work of classical Hollywood directors like Welles, Hawks, and Ford during a pivotal time in the history of American film criticism. What advice do you have for young writers who may be interested in starting down a similar path today?

A: It was easier to get started then, because the field was relatively new. A young writer such as me could get published widely and quickly. Film books were urgently needed. Today, the Internet is the focus of most reviewing and other writing on film, though there still are print magazines, and scholars can publish books, even if the demand for them unfortunately has lessened. We used to say that “Film is the art form of the twentieth century,” and this is the twenty-first. The problem every writer on film is facing now is how to make money from the Internet. New young writers have to write for nothing for a while (as I did) to get started, but soon enough you need to make a living, somehow. It’s hard today, but we’re in uncharted waters. Combining writing with teaching, as I do, is a good idea for many reasons.

2) Given your lifelong preoccupation with the cinema, what was it that inspired you to move in such a different direction for *Into the Nightmare*? What connection, if any, do you see it having with your film scholarship?

A: I worked as a volunteer in John F. Kennedy’s campaign in the 1960 Wisconsin presidential primary and began following the news of his assassination minutes after it happened. I had even written a short story about his assassination in October 1961 because of my fear that such an event might occur. This profound rupture in our national fabric became a lifelong preoccupation. I’d planned to go into politics,

but when my candidate was murdered and I realized the government did not want to solve the case, I lost my faith in our political system and decided to pursue a career as a writer (an investigative journalist and author) instead. I began researching the murders of President Kennedy and Officer J. D. Tippit intensively in the 1970s and launched my own investigation in 1982. It took all these years to finish my book, which benefited from its long gestation, since many other researchers contributed insights from which I learned, and many previously classified documents were released along the way, helping me understand the evidence I personally uncovered. My study of cinema informed the book in its chapters on the Zapruder film and the television coverage on the assassination weekend, and more generally in the book's analysis throughout of the media's role in the case and how the mainstream media have distorted the facts while guerrilla media writers and filmmakers have tried to tell us the truth.

3) You spent over three decades researching and writing this book. What was it that motivated you to push forward with the project during all of those years?

A: A profound desire to find the truth and to report what I was learning in my own investigation. We as citizens have had to take up the burden of investigating this case since the government failed in its duty to solve it and bring the perpetrators to justice. I could not rest until my work was done -- and it will never be done, because I will never stop researching the case. I found at the end of the writing process that the pain the assassination caused me (as it did to so many others) has barely abated and never will go away. But I have learned much about this case, and about myself and about our country, in the process. As I quote T. S. Eliot in the epigraph to the book:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

4) What do you feel it is about the J.F.K. assassination and its particular moment in history that continues to intrigue people five decades after the fact?

A: The fact that it changed our country fundamentally and forever. The fact that we lost a man who inspired us to live up to our country's values and still has the power do so. But we have to face the terrible fact that his death ended our experiment in democracy. We see the results today. We just have to look around at what our country has become as a result of the Coup of 1963.

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