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"Into the Nightmare" is a great book, a monumental book, and an authoritative assimilation of forty years of what everyone, off and on the record, has argued about the Kennedy assassination, plus what author Joseph McBride himself concludes.

Into the Nightmare: My Search for the Killers of President John F. Kennedy and Officer J.D. Tippit by Joseph McBride. Hightower Press, 675 pages, \$38.50.

By Gerald Peary

MY SEARCH FOR THE KILLERS OF PRESIDENT JOHN F.
KENNEDY AND OFFICER J. D. TIPPIT

INTO THE NIGHTMARE

JOSEPH
MCBRIDE

I'm known author Joseph McBride since we were both film-crazy students in the late 60s-early 70s at the University of Wisconsin. While I wrote movie reviews for the school newspaper, the *Daily Cardinal*, McBride did me one better: publishing at age 21 an astonishingly precocious critical volume on the works of Orson Welles. In the ensuing years, McBride has become perhaps America's most important film biographer, with seminal studies of Frank Capra and Steven Spielberg and a masterly, definitive book on his

all-time favorite director, John Ford. I'm also a Ford groupie, and, when we've corresponded through the years (McBride is a professor at San Francisco State), it's most often about our shared adulation for the filmmaker of *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

I had no idea that McBride, for many decades, has had an obsessive interest far far from cinema studies (well, except for Oliver Stone's *JFK* and the *Zapruder* film). As many others, he's been haunted to know, and strived to find out, who really killed JFK. Yes, McBride has been a conspiracy theorist since 1982 on the sly, with only a few close friends knowing it. He's led an extraordinary double life: movie guy by day, a JFK sleuth by night, on weekends, on vacations, whenever. By God, he has read EVERYTHING ever written about the Kennedy assassination, from absorbing each word of the Warren Commission, through multi-volume government reports, to classified and de-classified documents, to dozens and dozens of books, both on the right and left. The smart, responsible ones but also the nutty ones, the paranoid ones, the exploitative ones. And, on his own dime, he has flown to Washington for research, many times to Dallas, and to small-town Texas, checking out every lead, every witness.

Finally, finally, McBride spills all! After literally thirty years on the case! So that he can say exactly what he wants to say, with no editorial interference, he, whose books have come out under the imprint of Simon & Schuster and other prestigious imprints, has self-published *Into the Nightmare: My Search for the Killers of President John F. Kennedy and Officer J.D. Tippit*. It's 600-plus packed pages of what McBride has learned and concluded about what happened in Dallas on that tragic day in 1963. Although I have reservations about some of his determinations, I am in total awe of this book. Have I ever read any tome so extraordinarily researched? Many pages feel each like two years of grueling investigation.

So let me get it out: *Into the Nightmare* is a great book, a monumental book, and an authoritative assimilation of forty years of what everyone, off and on the record, has argued about the Kennedy assassination, plus what McBride himself concludes. Has a Pulitzer Prize ever gone to a self-published work?

The sections on the Kennedy killing are endlessly captivating, Curiously, my very favorite part of the book are the early chapters, the

autobiographical ones, in which McBride talks about his childhood and teen hood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was a believing Irish Catholic who was liberal, idealistic, political-minded, and, on three occasions, got to meet face to face his hero: young John F. Kennedy, who was running against Hubert Humphrey in the 1960 Wisconsin Primary. Yes, another movie reference: McBride was there in the admiring Milwaukee crowd when JFK spoke so eloquently, and Leacock-Pennebaker followed with a 16mm camera for *Primary*, the cinema verité classic.

In later years, McBride moved to the left, especially after living in LA and covering venal Hollywood for *Variety*. And he learned unpleasantries about Mr. Kennedy, the ardent Cold Warrior who, at home, was timid about enforcing civil rights. Still, the author explains, he remained a fan of this literate, witty President. JFK was shifting to the center on foreign affairs in his last days, wishing to extricate himself from Viet Nam and, post-Bay of Pigs, becoming estranged by those who demanded an all-out invasion of Cuba. As with many who've written of the Kennedy murder, McBride posits that the most likely killers were ultra-rightist anti-Castroites angered that the President had betrayed their cause.

Killers, with an "s." More than one. The most persuasive sections of *Into the Nightmare* are those which reconstruct What Happened at Dealey Plaza. Contrary to the Warren Report, there were, McBride proves, a spray of bullets, not one, which fell on JFK and Texas Governor John Connally; and they were from the front and back, and not from the Texas Book Depository. Two or three assassins worked together. And, lo, none of them was Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald was, McBride's favorite term, "a patsy," and when, in captivity, he screamed out his innocence, that's because he was. Without a lawyer present, Oswald was questioned for many hours by Dallas police who—surprise!—didn't tape record what was said. Meanwhile, ghoulish things were happening at the hospital morgue, where JFK lay. There's lots in the book, and it seems creepily credible, about how doctors mucked about with Kennedy's head, removing bullets so that only one was left. The one ostensibly coming from the rifle of Oswald.



Author Joseph McBride — his prose is Faulknerian thick.

There's no way in a book review to approximate the mighty prose of McBride, almost Faulknerian thick, in tracing minute-by-minute, and sometimes second-by-second, a whole cast of characters, many intersecting, on the fatal November day. So impressive! But where I can't get aboard with McBride is about the conspiratorial involvement of policeman J.D. Tippit, the second person killed that day allegedly by Oswald. I agree with McBride that Tippit's executor seems to be someone other than fall guy Lee Harvey. But I think this could have been a random killing in always-bloody Dallas.

Practically everything McBride learns through the years about Tippit's personality seems to be character evidence that Tippit had nothing to do with the assassination. He was a Kennedy voter who, many say, was pretty stupid, a dullard, a nobody in the police force. Why would he be picked out of hundreds of Dallas police, many publicly fascist, to take part in the assassination plot? There is no record of him walking about saying right-wing, traitorous things. And his wife, who no one connects with any conspiracy, said he came home and ate lunch the day he was shot down.

I love McBride's book, but I'm not convinced by what he believes so strongly: that J.D. Tippit's murder is the "Rosetta Stone" of the Kennedy assassination. If he was involved in shooting JFK (McBride thinks this is possible) or, much more likely, in hunting down Oswald to liquidate him, why would he have gone first for a BLT with his spouse?