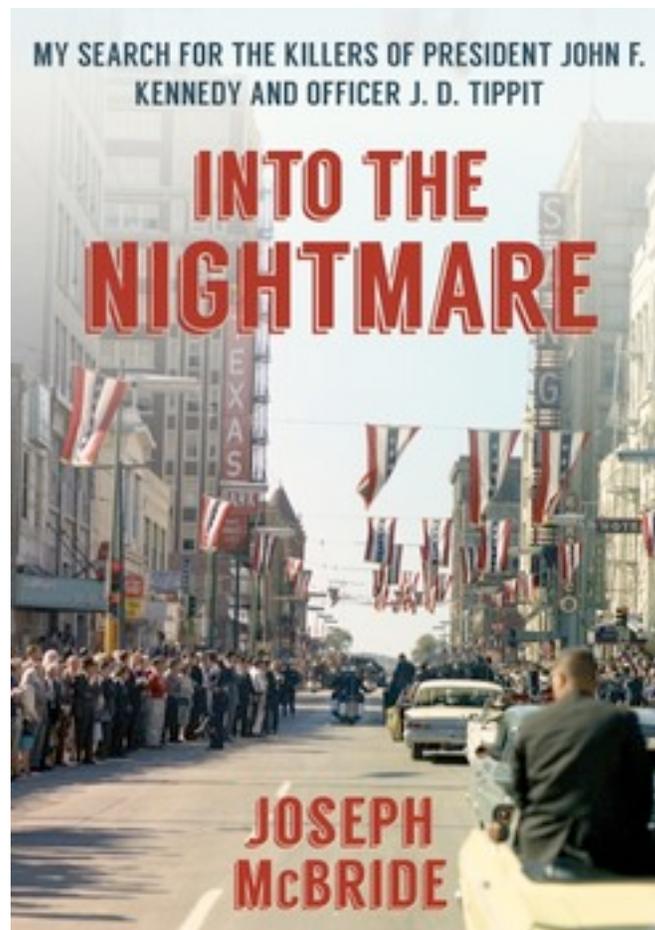


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An Interview with Joseph McBride on his new JFK book Into The Nightmare, Part 2

- [INDEPENDENT](#) JULY 30, 2013 BY: [JOSEPH GREEN](#)
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Independent newsletter

This is a continuation of my interview with Joseph McBride regarding [Into The Nightmare: My Search for the Killers of President John F. Kennedy and J. D. Tippit](#), so it is best to begin [there](#) first. As you will see shortly, there were so many fascinating twists and turns that it proved impossible to get to them all, and unfortunately the talk had to come to an end. For more details, please see McBride's superb book.

**We should talk about the Hoover memo a bit, and your experiences at The Nation magazine, and the issues trying to publish an article about it. The editor [Victor Navasky] had a guy with a CIC (Counterintelligence Corps) background edit your piece.**

Yes. Richard Lingeman, who is still at the *Nation* and a distinguished biographer. He recently wrote about his experiences with the Counterintelligence Corps in the 1950s. He specifically denies being a CIA operative but said he had some dealings with them, as you would if you were in the intelligence field. He was stationed in Japan. But the salient facts are that he had a background in intelligence and in 1988 he mentioned doing work for the United States Information Agency, which is part of the propaganda arm of our government. At the same time, he was rewriting my first article. To give full disclosure, I wrote a show called *Let Poland Be Poland* for the Reagan administration. I was against Reagan but at the time I was convinced he was on the right side of supporting Solidarity and it turned out to be a good thing. I have that small connection there.

When I found the Hoover memo, which is dated Nov 29, 1963, it revealed an FBI briefing done with George Bush of the CIA and described how the anti-Castro Cubans were reacting to the [Kennedy assassination](#).

**Which – interestingly – was a lie. [The memo indicates that those Cubans were sad about Kennedy's death, which they weren't.]**

Yeah. It is a strange cover story of some kind. They were worried about a negative reaction or something coming from the Cubans. It relates to Peter Dale Scott's [Phase One/Phase Two analysis](#). Scott had a big influence on me and helped me understand the political context. He has a theory that the plotters wanted the assassination to trigger an attack on Cuba which Kennedy had previously denied them. Curtis LeMay and others wanted to obliterate Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I think Kennedy was very

sobered by the Cuban Missile Crisis and so was trying to pull back on that. He was trying to reach out to Castro and work out a reasonable détente.

Via [Jean Daniel](#).

One thing I found out in my research in the analysis of the media is how they have covered up and distorted this case, but also been involved in some of the activities. [Life Magazine bankrolled a raid against Cuba](#) [using Alpha 66] which might have been part of the attempt to kill Castro, but some of the same players in the [JFK](#) assassination were involved in that as well. Then Time-Life became one of the leading cover-up agencies following the assassination, They owned the Zapruder film. Why would Life Magazine own a key piece of evidence in the case? And they distorted it as well.

I used to be skeptical about Zapruder film alteration. Over the years I had to kind of learn about a few things. I resisted believing that the Zapruder film had been altered apart from the obvious damage that Life Magazine did.

**The cutting out of the frames, yes.**

But [Douglas Horne](#)'s research proved to me that Zapruder film was altered in various ways. His interview with CIA technician Homer McMahon says that the version of the film he saw that weekend showed Kennedy being hit by 6-8 shots from at least three directions. We don't see that in the film and we don't see the car come to a stop. Senator Ralph Yarborough told me that the car came to a stop and Secret Service men ran out of the vehicle and you don't see this [in the Zapruder film], you see only Clint Hill jumping onto the car.

[Lyndon] Johnson was being investigated and Don Reynolds had been testifying that very day about corruption and bribery. [Robert Caro](#) says that this was happening at the exact moment that Kennedy was being shot. Also at that same moment, Life Magazine was holding a meeting in which they were about to conduct an investigation into Johnson's finances. Johnson knew he was likely to go to jail, and at the very least be dropped from the ticket, and this provides a powerful motive for him. For a long time I resisted believing that Johnson was involved.

**I think he was very blackmailable. It's clear he didn't like Kennedy, he had everything to gain from having Kennedy removed, and it seems pretty clear he knew it was going to happen. I don't think he ran the assassination. Unlike what Philip Nelson and Ed Tatro suggest – whom I really like – I don't think he was the prime mover of the assassination.**

One of the things I had to decide was how much to go into certain areas. For a while I was thinking of going into more detail on Johnson and how he was involved exactly, but that would have been a different book. That could be a whole book in itself, which some people have written – not very well, but it's a serious subject. I agree with you that he was not the main instigator. But he was certainly involved. Johnson ran the cover-up, and the Warren Commission was really the Johnson Commission. They called it the Warren Commission because it makes it sound better, but it was really LBJ controlling that. He was in a position to issue orders for everything, including the autopsies and destruction of evidence.

**No, I think that's all correct, I agree on that. Where I stop is the design of the assassination. The assassination is a military operation. Johnson either knows about it beforehand or he is being blackmailed into cooperating because he has a powerful motive to do so. Both for reasons of power and to stay out of jail. Johnson was obviously a very bad guy. I think last year – or maybe the year before – Ed Tatro gave a presentation at COPA where he very entertainingly gave us 50 terrible anecdotes about LBJ. It was funny and appalling at the same time, but...it's hard trying to imagine the mentality of a guy who was taking his genitals out all the time, peeing on his security detail. That guy was running the country for a while.**

It is astonishing. Caro does a great number on Johnson, although when it comes to the assassination...I was really hoping he would rise to the occasion. Some years ago, Caro had given a speech in which he said that it was "*literally* a blood feud" between Kennedy and LBJ. He didn't say *figuratively*. This is a man who uses words very carefully. So I had hopes. But when it came down to it, he buckled under because you don't make it to the big dance – the awards – by questioning the Warren Report.

One of the things Yarborough told me was about Johnson's demeanor, because he was riding in the back seat with him. He was tense, very quiet. He wouldn't wave at people. Yarborough said he even told Johnson, "Look at all these people, they're all waving at you, why don't you wave back?" Even though they weren't fond of each other. And Johnson just stared straight ahead, very preoccupied, tense. He attributed that to the Don Reynolds hearing only later, when he found out about it. He also said that Johnson and [Rufus] Youngblood were both listening to the walkie-talkie Youngblood carried on his shoulder.

When Penn Jones said that Johnson was "ducking" – you can see in the Altgens photograph that Johnson is leaning forward - right after the shots were fired, LBJ huddled with Youngblood to listen to the walkie-talkie. But I think they were actually listening in during the shooting. There were two frequencies – one for the motorcade itself but another that connected with the White House situation room and local communication hookup through the Sheraton Hotel. I suspect they were listening to get the bigger picture of what was happening both in Washington and Dallas.

**When I first read that in your book, the first thing that went through my mind was when Johnson later asks Hoover "were they shooting at me?"**

That's fascinating. People wonder whether Johnson was engaging in a sham or if he was really worried. One thing that's very odd that goes against protocol, is for both presidents to be in the same motorcade, especially that close together. It's very strange. So some people think the plotters were sending a message to Johnson by making him witness the assassination.

**Johnson is riding in this car and he knows what's going to happen, but maybe this thought goes through his mind – if they can get rid of one, they can get rid of the other. How can he be sure that he is not also being double-crossed?**

Some things I didn't go into. After the assassination, LBJ became very suspicious of the Secret Service and refused to have them protect him. He got the FBI to send men instead to provide his protection because he didn't trust the Secret Service. Remarkable.

**It is certainly suggestive. He is a gangster who knows he's dealing with other gangsters.**

I think Vince Palamara has done great work on the Secret Service side of the case, and he proves something that I also could not have imagined at the time in the 1960's – that the Secret Service was involved in the assassination. If you study political assassinations, you find that almost inevitably the bodyguards are involved. Like Indira Gandhi, who was killed by her bodyguards. It's very hard to kill a head of state without penetrating the security apparatus in some way.

In the book I mention a lead that hasn't been explored enough. As we know, E. Howard Hunt gave a deathbed confession to his son. (Some people think he [Hunt] was one of the three tramps.) Now the guy running the operation was Cord Meyer, Jr. of the CIA. Hunt says that he was running it with Johnson and that LBJ had directed him to do the operational details. He didn't necessarily know who the triggermen were. Such operations have “cut-outs,” where one triggerman doesn't know who the other one is, and everything is compartmentalized. But this was a surprise to me. Cord Meyer is a possible candidate for a mastermind of the assassination – and it's interesting to note that he was married to Kennedy's mistress Mary Meyer, who was allegedly killed for being too curious and knowledgeable. It needs more research. The whole issue of Johnson's culpability is a subject that needs more work, as Robert Caro unfortunately didn't do it for us.

**One thing that I hadn't mentioned but occurs to me now – I take it you've seen Errol Morris's [short film](#) with Josiah Thompson?**

Yes, It's disturbing.

**For both guys.**

Yes. Alex Cox did a [short film](#) in response, and he also has a [book](#) out on the assassination as well [*The President and the Provocateur: The Parallel Lives of JFK and Lee Harvey Oswald*]. He's great, a maverick film director, does great work.

**Absolutely.** I also have an intense interest in 1970's film – I'm kind of an *Easy Riders Raging Bulls* kind of guy, love the period with films like *Three Days of the Condor*, *The Conversation*, and especially *The Parallax View*.

You know, I got to interview Alan Pakula [director of *The Parallax View*, *Klute*, *All the President's Men*, *Sophie's Choice* and many others].

**Fantastic.**

Wonderful guy, Brilliant man. I had an interview lined up with him when I was on Daily Variety. He was shooting *All the President's Men* and I was supposed to go to his house on Saturday afternoon but somehow the publicist didn't tell him I was coming. So I rang the doorbell at his house and there he was, but completely preoccupied with the shoot. He said "I'm really sorry, I don't have time to talk now." But I threw him a question – I was close to someone who knew the people who had written the book on the Robert Kennedy assassination –

**Bill Turner and -**

[Jon] Christian and Turner, right. [The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy](#). My friend had told me that Bob Woodward was CIA. And actually it turns out he was in Naval Intelligence. ONI. But I mentioned it quickly to Pakula: "You're making *All the President's Men* - have you heard the story that Woodward is CIA?" And he responded, "Yeah, I've heard this. But, frankly, I have to not consider that while I'm making this film because if I did, it would drive me crazy."

**Wow.**

"So maybe it's true, but I can't go into that, it would drive me crazy and I wouldn't know how to make this film." Someone should remake that film. It's a really good film but it's a fairy tale.

When you read [Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin's] *Silent Coup* and [Jim Hougan's] *Secret Agenda*, you realize it was an intelligence operation to bring down Nixon, with the help of Woodward, who was a Naval Intelligence officer posing as a journalist. This is still a big taboo in

American journalism because it undercuts the notion of the hero Woodward and the great liberal bastion *Washington Post*.

### **Instead of the CIA front that it is.**

The *Post* is a CIA front. One of the interesting things about the *Nation* article I did is that the story was picked up by many different outlets. The media was fascinated with it for about ten days and I was on C-SPAN and Brian Lamb interviewed me. Even Tom Wicker had written an article questioning whether we really wanted a President with an intelligence background, because he might be blackmailed with his dark secrets. That's true, but the fact is that you don't get to be CIA director without *some* experience in the field. He lied under oath during his hearing when he was being confirmed as CIA director. If the media had followed up on my story, he might have been disqualified from being President. But the media had been interested in my story until the CIA broke their policy and announced that the George Bush from the memo was a different George Bush.

There was one other George Bush at that time working for the CIA and I found him very quickly. He was a low level operative, a young man at the time, George William Bush, a functionary who did not receive the briefing. The media dropped it like a hot potato at that moment and they did not report on my follow up stories in the *Nation*. But the *Washington Post* didn't cover it at all. They didn't even run a summary instead of the AP story, as some papers will do. They just ignored it. And a friend of mine at one point said, look at the comic strip "Bloom County" around that time. It was a comic strip and it appeared in both the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post* that same day, and in the comic one of the characters is reading a newspaper with the headline "Bush was in the CIA in 1963." In the Baltimore paper, you could read it. In the *Post*, they had blown up the panel so you couldn't see the headline. They went to the lengths of *censoring a comic strip* to hide it from their readers. A little indication about how threatened they were. And then later I learned that when Bush was starting his Zapata oil company, one of the investors was Eugene Meyer, who owned the *Washington Post* and was the father of Katharine Graham.

Bush was also the head of the Republican National Committee at the time of Watergate, which I had pointed out in my original *Nation* article and

which Lingeman rewrote and removed. And I said it was significant because...it was possible that Bush was one of the people who helped engineer Nixon's ouster. He was one of the people who convinced him to resign. He may have been working behind the scenes to push Nixon out. *The Nation* didn't like that at all and they said I was paranoid, which I found insulting. I also didn't like them having someone rewrite my articles, but I felt it was more important to get the story out. It was the only time in my career I allowed someone to rewrite my work, although I was able to rewrite his rewrite even though there were certain things I wasn't allowed to put back in.

**There is this thing in the Nixon tapes, and I can't recall if Haldeman or Nixon says it, but they are trying to have something done and basically the line is "Well, get George Bush to do that, because he'll do anything."**

Ah, yeah. That was one of the odd things, here's this guy who is an obscure congressman from Texas in 1968, but he's already being considered by Nixon as a vice-presidential candidate? It's very weird, because they had so many more ostensibly qualified people. He ended up with Agnew, who was obviously terrible, but why would you even consider a first-term Texas congressman? But this tells you they had a deep connection. Prescott Bush was one of Nixon's first backers, and some people even think that it was Prescott who picked Nixon to run in that first race against Jerry Voorhis.

**Yes. Nixon talked about the "Committee of 100."**

Nixon's a fascinating character, I wish I had more time to go into him. When you go into the Nixon tapes and the Haldeman memoir, you find out that Nixon is talking about "the Texans" who supplied some of the money for the Watergate burglars. People think that George Bush was possibly one of the people who supplied that money which was being laundered in Mexican bank. Bush was possibly involved in the actual Watergate break-in, which in my opinion and that of Jim Hougan and Colodny & Gettlin, was a CIA operation designed to create a trap for Nixon to walk into. And he walked right in and started committing illegal acts. And I think Oliver Stone's *Nixon* is a brilliant film, especially the uncut version. It's really an accurate

representation. They show – have you seen the long version with Helms? [In the film *Nixon*, there is a long scene where Anthony Hopkins, as Nixon, confronts Richard Helms at his CIA office. The scene was cut from the theatrical release but is available on DVD.]

### **That's the best scene in the picture.**

Sam Waterston, playing Helms. It really gets to the heart of darkness, as he speaks to Nixon about the secrets that lie beneath the surface. And critics really missed the point of that movie – Oliver had to make it a subtext ultimately because he was so beaten up about *JFK* – but it was about Nixon's guilty knowledge of the Kennedy assassination.

Penn Jones put out that story about the party at Clint Murchison's home [prior to the assassination, in which Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, and others were alleged to have participated]. I don't believe it.

### **I don't believe it either.**

However, Nixon did have some guilty knowledge, it's clear, and he was in Dallas the day of the assassination. And I found that Bush had been there that day as well. And then Russ Baker in his book found that Bush had been there the night before, which I hadn't known. Baker concludes that Bush and his wife flew to Tyler, Texas on the morning of November 22. Baker told me he believes Bush's wife when she says they then flew to Houston from Dallas on the afternoon of November 22, but – small disagreement here – I think that Bush stayed in Dallas, like he told the FBI that he was going to do. He was checking into the Sheraton hotel which just so happened to be center for the White House communication agency and the Secret Service.

It's interesting how that all ties together. So it turns out that there are four present and/or future U.S. presidents in Dallas [on November 22, 1963]: Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Bush.



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