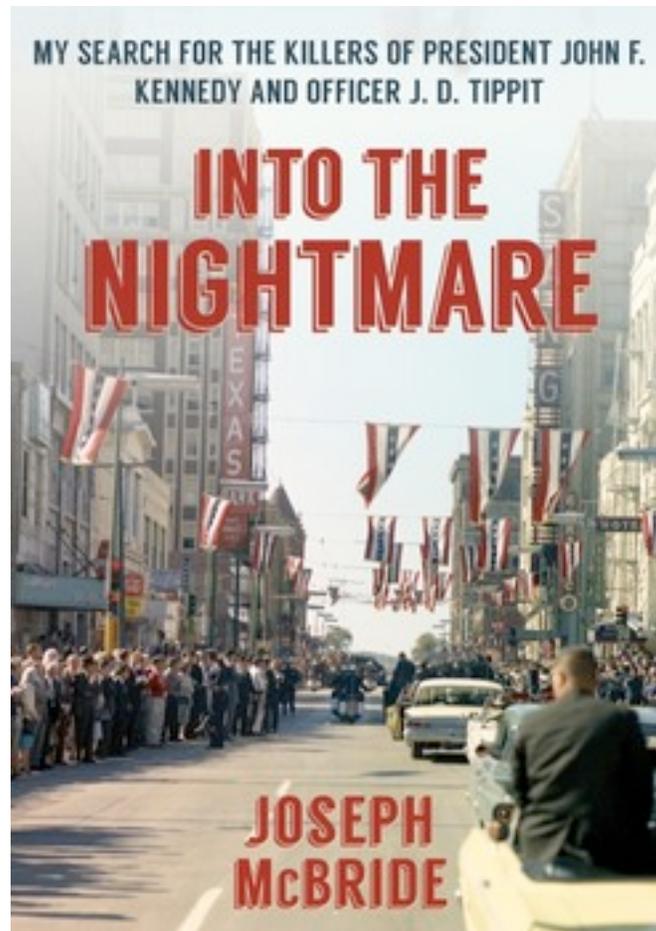


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# **An interview with Joseph McBride on his new JFK book Into The Nightmare, Part 1 (Photos)**

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### Independent newsletter

Joseph McBride has been researching the Kennedy assassination for most of his life. As a twelve-year-old in 1960, he handed out flyers for John F. Kennedy's presidential run and was only sixteen when Kennedy was murdered in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963. He grew up to be a journalist, having published in well-known entities such as *The Nation* and *The New York Review of Books*, but also producing many books – including biographies of Hollywood greats like [Orson Welles](#), [Frank Capra](#), [John Ford](#), and [Steven Spielberg](#). His newest work is entitled [\*Into the Nightmare: My Search for the Killers of President John F. Kennedy and Officer J. D. Tippit.\*](#)

View slideshow: [Into the Nightmare](#)

For the uninitiated, that subtitle might be surprising. Who is Officer J. D. Tippit? That has been one of the enduring mysteries in the JFK assassination, and McBride breaks much new ground in piecing the story together. Tippit was allegedly murdered by Lee Harvey Oswald later in the afternoon after Oswald had already allegedly killed the President. In fact, Oswald was never arraigned for killing the President, only Tippit. However, the idea that he shot either man is extremely dubious and fifty years of controversy have resulted. McBride enters this fray with a remarkable new work that is part memoir, part critical analysis, and part investigative journalism. He kindly agreed to participate in an interview.

**Maybe a good place to start – I happened to read [Deep Politics Forum](#) and saw that you've been discussing your book there, and there are already little ripples from your opinion of researcher [Mary Ferrell](#).**

Yeah, I expected that to be provocative. There are lots of people who think she was wonderful.

**But there are also a lot of people who think otherwise.**

It's getting some good reactions. Some people are happy that the whistle is being blown on her. Since I'm a longtime journalist, I have a lot of experience in seeing through people fairly well. I smelled a rat with her right away. I write in the book about the [Belmont memo](#) – which nobody had ever written about before when I found it in the 1980s – and it is an amazing memo. It talks about how there is a bullet in Kennedy's right temple and this bullet was never entered into evidence. That memo alone destroys the Warren Report.

**Sure.**

I wanted to make sure that no one had ever written about this before, and I had heard that Mary Ferrell was very helpful. So I contacted her. She said "This is startling information and you're onto something important." And I asked her to please keep it to herself, because I want to print this. And when it was done I sent her the article and she said, "Now I'll feel free to tell anybody about it." And I said, well you told me you wouldn't spread the word. And she said "Now that I've read it, I can't not tell people about it." So that was very duplicitous. But nobody really wrote about that much until

[Doug Horne](#) did a good analysis in his books. Also, Dale Myers reproduced it in his book *With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Murder of Officer J. D. Tippit*, but people didn't seem to recognize how important that memo was.

**I saw that you mentioned that and I have not read the Myers book.**

Just like the Warren volumes, the book ends up being very useful because there are always these nuggets in there to find and follow. In effect, the Warren Commission undercut their own report by putting out the 26 volumes. There's that quote from Allen Dulles who said "The American people don't read." But that actually didn't turn out to be true. In fact, people have been studying it since it came out, like Sylvia Meagher. I still think the best book on the assassination is her [Accessories After the Fact](#). [This book is one of the first of the works criticizing the Warren Commission, but is being reissued in September 2013.] A great book that holds up beautifully. She logically demolished the report using the 26 volumes. Myers's book is very pro-Warren Report and minimizes all the problems and puts a lot of the contrary information in footnotes, but there is a lot of data that is useful in spite of itself.

**I'd like to ask you a bit about [Penn Jones](#), who is mentioned a few times in your book. I never knew him – he died really before I even knew he existed, and he is one of the first-generation critics I wish I had met. He was a good friend of my friend John Judge, and if you have any stories I'd love to hear them.**

He was an amazing, wonderful character. I grew up in a family of journalists, my parents were journalists, and so I have a certain affection for the old journalistic style. My friend Sam Fuller – whose work you may know –

**Oh yeah, of course!**

He and I hit it off instantly because we had that newspaper connection. Fuller was an old journalist and his work as a filmmaker was like an investigative reporter. Like [Shock Corridor](#) which came out right before the Kennedy assassination, really hits the nail on the head as far as analyzing the sickness of the country. The James Best character in that is somewhat

like an Oswald-type character. So when I met Penn, I thought, wow, he's just like Sam Fuller, he's an old newspaper guy like me. And we became friends instantly. We spoke the same language. Penn was a very original, brave maverick in the best tradition of such. He wasn't always right, and he could go off on tangents – sometimes you had to take things with a grain of salt because he could make mistakes. Dave Perry loves to analyze Penn's mistakes. But he broke a lot of ground and he was out there in the early days, pounding the pavement, knocking on doors, getting those doors slammed in his face at times...coming up with leads for all of us and writing very eloquently on the case.

**Sure. We all have our foibles, and our blind alleys, but that's much less important to me than being sincere and aggressive about the truth.**

He was very passionate about Kennedy and America, a WWII veteran. He was convinced it was a military takeover and I think it's true. I spent a lot of time with him. Met him in 1983 for the 20th anniversary when I went to Dallas. Penn used to lead the ceremonies by giving a little prayer and a talk with his gimme cap [a cap given away by companies to farmers and truckers] on. I liked the way he dressed as a regular working guy.

He was very lucid at that time. Unfortunately, by 1993 when I spent about three months in Dallas, he was mentally almost gone. I spent a lot of time at Penn and Elaine's farm house in Waxahachie and we'd watch movies but he couldn't say very much. All he would say – he would repeat this one phrase over and over – “they like what they got and they ain't never gonna give it back.” It was actually a kind of distillation of his whole attitude. Over the years he said many interesting things to me, like pointing out that Johnson was the only who ducked. [This is a reference to the [Altgens photograph](#).]

**Before he was gone, Penn asked John to continue that tradition of the moment of silence on the grassy knoll, so John has been doing that every year and it is part of the [COPA conference](#) every November. Although it's questionable whether we're going to be able to do it this year.**

Yeah, the whole thing is *mishegas*, sounds crazy. It's awful that they're trying to keep people out. The police department says they are going to keep out extremists.

**Yeah, by their terms.**

That fellow in the *Dallas Observer* – he's been writing good stuff – [Jim Schutze](#). He said the one extremist they should keep out is the mayor.

**Yeah, he's been great. We have somebody in Dallas who still likes free speech.**

He pointed out it's a sign of insecurity that they have to control it so much. They keep out dissenting voices and it makes the city look bad. They're trying to get beyond the stigma of the tragedy, and perhaps they never will, but there are ways to deal with these things responsibly. Germany has dealt with WWII and the Holocaust by memorializing it and admitting their guilt and teaching it in schools. If Dallas did that, people would respect them for it. But instead they look like they have something to hide.

**Which clearly they do.**

Yeah. *(laughs)* Well if you read my book you realize that the Dallas police are up to their necks in the assassination, the plotting. There are some people who say it was just unfortunate that it happened in Dallas, there was just some crazy person...but actually it was more pervasive than just one person. The Dallas police and elements of the city were involved and some people in the Dallas establishment know that.

**Oh, there's nothing accidental about it.**

When Oswald is killed surrounded by several dozen policemen, handcuffed between two detectives and shot, that is enough to tarnish the city forever. But then you find out – and this was a major discovery – that Tippit and another policeman were sent out to find Oswald at the time.

Edgar Lee Tippit, [policeman J. D. Tippit's father] who was 90 years old and sharp as a tack and to whom no one had ever spoken before on the record, told me that Marie Tippit was visited by a policeman after the assassination

to tell her what happened. He and J.D. had been told to hunt Oswald and Tippit had gotten there and been shot. The other policeman had apparently been in an auto accident. This was all new information. Although people had speculated – even as early as December 1963 – that Tippit had been sent out to find Oswald and shoot him, or capture him – but this is fresh confirmation from an inside source. Edgar Lee didn't know the name of the other policeman so I tried to explore that. I come out with some names of some policemen who were not where they were supposed to be and may be candidates.

**That was a fascinating part of the book and information not available anywhere else.**

That's an example of working as a reporter. I've done biographies of Frank Capra and John Ford, for example, and I've learned you have to do a tremendous amount of interviews as well as research into the available documents to get the whole picture. You can't do just one or the other. I spent seven years researching Capra to dot every i and cross every t. And I did the same thing with Tippit. When I did my Spielberg book, no one had ever done a serious biography of him, and no one had ever bothered to look up his friends, the people he had done films with as kids. What they all told me was that they had been waiting 30 years for someone to ring the doorbell.

So when the opportunity arose to talk to Edgar Lee, I went to his home in east Texas and sat down with him. The other key thing he told me was what an uncannily expert shot his son was. There was one document in his personnel file that shows J. D. to be a mediocre shot, but this seems like disinformation.

**And as you pointed out in the book, the further along you get into Tippit's personnel file, the material grows more and more sparse – the opposite of what you would expect.**

Yes, that's suspicious, suggesting it was sanitized. A policeman who served for 11 years would have more than one firing skill evaluation. It's odd that there's only one. After about 1956 the file gets thinner and thinner.

**One gets the feeling that this book has been gestating for 50 years. It's relatively "safe" now on the left to write about McCarthy – but JFK remains a hot topic. Were you waiting for a while to put this book out because of that, or did it just take that long to get it right?**

It took that long. This was a very difficult book to write about for a lot of reasons. It's a very complex subject and intricate and no one person can do the whole thing. That's why we rely on a community, why people like us form a community to work on this stuff. One of the best pieces of advice Penn gave me – and he also gave it to Larry Ray Harris – was take one part of the case that hasn't been studied enough and research the hell out of it. So I zeroed in on the Tippit part of it. We learned this in Watergate. The hidden part is the most important, the point of maximum psychological resistance is most important.

When you read the Warren Report, one thing that strikes you is how little it talks about Tippit. Sylvia Meagher said [Tippit] was unknown and unknowable, and I took that as a challenge. For Capra, for example, his life was completely different from what people thought, and if you're a reporter you can get the real story if you work hard enough. Of course, in this case it's even more difficult because witnesses have been killed, or they're scared. One of the unfortunate side effects of Penn's mysterious deaths [detailed in his out-of-print book *Forgive My Grief* and sequels] is that it scared some witnesses into hiding.

Now there is an extremely high percentage of violence in the relatively small section of the Tippit case. The high degree of mortality is more than even other areas of the assassination, and there is a high degree of anxiety among those witnesses. That tells you something right there. So it took a lot of time and legwork and research at the National Archives - six million pages came out after [Oliver Stone's movie] *JFK*, although many documents are still being kept secret after all these years. [Jefferson Morley](#) is still trying to pry documents out about George Joannides who was supervising the anti-Castro Cubans. After 50 years, they're still withholding documents.

When I told one of my friends I was writing this book, that person asked "So what contemporary issues are you interested in?" I said this *is* a

contemporary issue. Morley is still trying to get documents being hidden for reasons of national security. What is the national security reason for hiding something after 50 years? Army intelligence and Secret Service documents have been purged. The autopsy photos are still hidden. A lot of the evidence was altered and falsified so critical analysis becomes key for evaluation. I have learned not to take things at face value. When I was a kid I was raised Catholic and Democrat and I had my beliefs shattered and I no longer was able to take things at face value.

With Tippit, some witnesses say Oswald did it, and some say the killer didn't look anything like Oswald, and some people say two men did it, and you have to sort all this out and figure out. It's like [the Akira Kurosawa film] *Rashomon* where you have different versions of reality. It took a lot of work to shape this out. I experimented with different approaches and finally decided on a memoir, and the book follows my evolution. I was a skeptic right from the beginning, because at 12:40PM that day, the radio reported shots fired from the overpass at the front, and then at one o'clock, they changed to the Texas School Book Depository and I thought immediately there was something wrong. They didn't bother explaining why the story had changed. I smelled a rat within 20 minutes. And then that evening on television at 7:55PM when Oswald said he hadn't shot anybody and that he was a patsy, I believed him. He seemed honest and credible. He clearly was shocked to be accused of shooting Kennedy. But then like a lot of people I was fooled by the Warren Report until the books started to come out – Mark Lane, Sylvia Meagher – and the media was fairly open about debating it. By about '67 [I felt I was] totally unable to evaluate the case, but I feel now that it was the beginning of wisdom.

Then Watergate opened my eyes, because here was a genuine conspiracy in which everybody recognized it. It validated [Peter Dale Scott's](#) deep politics, the hidden aspects of government that lie beneath the surface. We don't know a lot about Obama's government, and when people like Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden come forward, they're getting prosecuted for trying to tell us the truth. As a result of the Kennedy assassination, things changed forever and it still affects the present day.

*This interview will continue in Part 2 and will be published soon.*

**Joseph Green**, San Antonio Progressive Examiner

Joseph Green is a private investigator, researcher, and author of the book *Dissenting Views*. He is a member of the Coalition on Political Assassinations and on the board of directors of JFKMI. His work has appeared in the *San Antonio Current*, *History on the Web*, *Op Ed News*, and *CTKA/Probe*...