

# The Kennedy Assassination, Deep Politics, and Denial

In America we are now approaching a consensual state of mind about the Kennedy assassination that is perhaps as bizarre as the assassination itself. Increasingly, it is admitted that the facts of the President's murder are not fully known, let alone understood. Some of the major findings of the first official investigation, the Warren Commission in 1964, have now been authoritatively demolished by the second, the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1979.

The new findings prove that there was something seriously wrong, not just with the initial investigation (i.e., a cover-up) but with the legal and political systems that needed a cover-up to conceal their criminal shortcomings. For example, we now know that one of the Warren Report's discredited propositions, that Lee Harvey Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby, "was not involved with Chicago's criminal element" (WR 785), was the result not of inadequate intelligence but of a deliberate deception of the Warren Commission by the FBI, designed to keep organized crime out of the picture.

There are allegations of deliberate deception on even more central matters, such as the handling of the President's autopsy and the physical evidence. Most of these allegations are hotly disputed. The physical and medical evidence present ordinary citizens with a profound dilemma of credibility. Either the evidence is true, in which case the President and Governor John Connally were hit by only two bullets causing a total of

eight wounds; or, if this result defies our credulity, we must accept that there has been massive falsification of the evidence.<sup>1</sup>

But with respect to the Warren Report's portrait of Jack Ruby as a loner there is now no such dilemma: this portrait was false, and the FBI had gone out of its way to conceal Ruby's organized-crime connections. If considered objectively, the acceptance that the Warren Commission findings were falsified, even in this one area, should lead to questions about the political succession of the United States that was ratified by the Commission's findings. Outside the United States one customarily does find such questioning, if not indeed a complacent cynicism that without either knowledge or curiosity simply assumes guilt on the part of the U.S. political establishment itself. And yet within the United States there is not only disinterest but psychological resistance, from the right and left as well as the mainstream, to examining the question further. As a result there is still little or no institutional will to address and deal with the highest-level American political crime of this century.

Instead the search for the truth has been left, by default, to a small band of self-selected critics, usually derided as "buffs" or "assassinologists." These, often disagreeing among themselves, have certainly failed to produce a generally persuasive alternative account of how the President was killed. Indeed their often strident disagreements may have only strengthened the general impression that the President's murder was a mystery which will never be solved.

I believe this failure has been an unnecessary one, caused by the tunnel vision of most critics and their opponents. They have been too fixated on the least answerable question: Who really killed the President? And they have paid far too little attention to the contextual question, both more important and paradoxically more easy to answer: What were the structural defects in governance and society that allowed this huge crime to be so badly investigated (or, in other terms, to go unpunished)? In simpler words, how could American institutions harbor and protect such evil?

Let us for a moment consider two revealing areas in which false claims put forward in the Warren Report have been definitively and finally refuted by the Report of the House Committee. Significantly, these do not bear on the hotly contested question of the President's murder; instead they concern Jack Ruby, the murderer of the President's alleged

assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. The first false claim by the Warren Commission was that Ruby acted alone and spontaneously in killing Oswald. The House Committee showed quite convincingly that Ruby's entry to the Dallas police basement had been assisted by members of the Dallas police department. Ruby probably entered the basement through an unlocked and unguarded stairwell; yet this disturbing probability was obscured by a false alternative story corroborated by at least four police officers. One of these officers failed a polygraph test on these questions in 1964, yet this failure was kept a secret until the House Committee revealed it in 1978.

What is now known about Ruby's entry into the basement suggests collusion and corruption among the Dallas police. The second false claim of the Warren Commission, that the evidence "does not establish a significant link between Ruby and organized crime" (WR 801), indicates corruption of our political institutions at the highest national level. The FBI had transmitted to the Commission the assurance of one of Ruby's friends that Ruby was "not outfit connected" (22 WH 372); only those knowledgeable about crime who bothered to consult the footnoted citations could learn that this friend was Dave Yaras, one of the syndicate's top killers at the time, and that a similar assurance given to the FBI had come from a head of organized crime in Chicago—two sources who should not have been considered persuasive. The FBI did not tell the Warren Commission that these interviews exonerating organized crime came from organized crime itself.

Thanks to the revelations of the House Committee, which produced a staff report of over one thousand pages on Ruby's organized-crime connections, we can now see that in 1964, as on many other occasions, the FBI, in blandly transmitting such worthless assurances, was covering up the existence of organized crime in America. But it is hard for most Americans to accept that there was such collusion and corruption at the top of the U.S. government, paralleling that in the Dallas police. Such an acceptance would compel most Americans, particularly those with status in the present regime, to alter their conscious relations to the society which protects them.

The collective response to the Kennedy assassination, in short, has been marked by psychological denial. This denial is even shared by those of the assassination critics or buffs who have spent years looking for external killers of the President: whether Communists, Cubans,

Corsicans, the CIA, or even “organized crime” itself, if demonized and projected outward as some kind of external enemy rather than an integral element of our domestic deep-political economy.

This need to deny ugly facts about our civilization is a universal one. Through writing poetry I have come to accept its presence in myself. My own early researches into the Kennedy assassination, as into the related topic of the Vietnam War, focused on external conspiratorial forces, impacting on a victimized body politic. What none of us (myself included) wish to accept is that the unsolved assassination is a symptom of something wrong today, not just in 1963, in the heart of the society in which we live.

And now we come to the heart of the paradox. Today virtually everyone concedes that there *is* something profoundly wrong with American society. Psychological denial cannot repress this fundamental perception. Try, however, suggesting that the Kennedy assassination was a symptom of something structurally wrong in American society, and you will see this suggestion rejected, energetically, by intellectuals from the right, center, and left of the American political spectrum. Rejected, indeed, with an almost desperate energy. What is going on here?

In this book I will argue that, just as repression of these ugly facts is psychological, so the exploration of them can be psychotherapeutic, for both the writer and the audience, and in the end for society itself.

## POLITICS, PARAPOLITICS, AND DEEP POLITICS

Let me for a moment digress on the superficiality of my own early researches into the Kennedy assassination. I used to summarize them collectively as the investigation of *parapolitics*, which I defined (with the CIA in mind) as “a system or practice of politics in which accountability is consciously diminished.”<sup>2</sup> This term referred chiefly, but not exclusively, to the world of intelligence agencies and similar organizations, where secrecy and covert operations were adopted as a matter of deliberate policy.

I still see value in this definition and mode of analysis. But parapolitics as thus defined is itself too narrowly conscious and intentional to describe the deeper irrational movements which culminated collectively in the murder of the President; it describes at best only an intervening layer of the irrationality under our political culture’s rational surface.

Thus I now refer to parapolitics as only one manifestation of *deep politics*, all those political practices and arrangements, deliberate or not, which are usually repressed rather than acknowledged.

The chapters in this book explore many processes of politics at levels usually not acknowledged or reported and indeed repressed and denied. Normally, these deep political processes are not brought to the public eye: for example, the way in which major drug traffickers are recurrently protected by the U.S. Justice Department, or the way in which some of the top traffickers have been recurrently named in connection with the systematic sexual corruption of members of Congress. Such arrangements are in fact widely known, but rarely written about. One way or another, scholars and journalists learn to back off.

The resulting social system is relatively stable, and the fact that certain procedures are repressed from public consciousness becomes itself suppressed. Occasionally, however, such "connections" between overworld and underworld impact radically upon the public realm, and we have unexplained crises such as the Kennedy assassination, Watergate, and Contragate.

One thesis of this book is that, because of the underlying continuities of deep politics, such crises are interrelated. To study any one of them is to acquire knowledge about some of the principal players, and their procedures, in the others. In this way we become aware of a violent milieu underlying American politics, including the ex-CIA Cuban exiles and their American handlers (such as the Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis, who earlier, as we shall see, had figured in the Warren Commission files on the Kennedy assassination).

In the United States, just as in other countries, parapolitics, including the activities of government and private intelligence agencies, recurrently has recourse to persons from such a milieu. Thus parapolitics has always been close to, dependent on, and interactive with deep politics. An example of deep politics is the way Tammany Hall, in alliance with ethnic gangsters, refined patronage and corruption into a working system for dividing the spoils in an ethnically divided New York City. This arrangement grew by itself, was never consciously designed, and hence was not truly parapolitical.

A seminal example of parapolitics was the use of the Tammany connection by the U.S. government in 1945, for the first postwar occupational government of Italy and Sicily. A number of former New York

politicians were installed in AMGOT, the Allied Military Government, while Lucky Luciano and other mafiosi were released and deported to Italy or Sicily. Vito Genovese, a mafia family leader, was installed as an interpreter at AMGOT headquarters; through organized black-marketing in U.S. army trucks (as described in *Catch 22*), he became the connection or go-between.<sup>3</sup>

This particular scandal has been chronicled in histories of organized crime, rather than histories of U.S. foreign relations. In fact it is probably more paradigmatic of the latter than of the former. Such arrangements were repeated in Vietnam, where subordinates of Santos Trafficante, a Tampa mafioso with CIA connections, arrived not long after the first U.S. combat troops.<sup>4</sup> They were repeated again in Contragate.

The phenomenon was not just one of corruption, but of governance. The U.S. government, like Tammany in the nineteenth century, wished its own gangs to control others, especially on the left—which is to say it preferred organized crime to either disorganized crime or radicalism. That the AMGOT-Genovese arrangement pleased the underworld as well as the underworld is best documented by the fact that Charles Poletti, the army colonel responsible for Genovese's appointment, and once described by Luciano as "one of our good friends," went on to become an Overseer of Harvard University.<sup>5</sup>

This parapolitical connection was a continuing, not an ad hoc arrangement. It survived, with progressive modifications, to become part of the deep political underpinnings of first Watergate and then Contragate, both of which, at a deeper level, involved drug-trafficking Cubans in Miami.<sup>6</sup> The common denominator, linking U.S. organized criminals in Italy, Vietnam, and Central America, was the highly centralized international drug traffic. Luciano, Trafficante, and the ex-CIA Miami Cubans assisting the Nicaraguan Contras were all successive parts of an ongoing and influential trafficking arrangement; and even a CIA agent has acknowledged that this arrangement was influential in part because of its services to friendly intelligence networks, including the CIA. (The agent, Thomas Tripodi, wrote in secret CIA and DEA reports on drugs that "the American authorities were instrumental in the revival of the Sicilian Mafia," and that the largest non-Sicilian importers of heroin into the United States were "the Corsicans, who had also been buttressed by the CIA as an anti-Communist force.")<sup>7</sup>

I first became aware of all this in the course of my years of anti-war research into the origins of the U.S. commitment to fight a war in Vietnam. As a former Canadian diplomat I had been exposed very peripherally to the secret Canadian cable traffic of the 1950s on Indochina (where Canada was a member of the three-nation International Control Commission). By 1963 I could no longer remember what I had read a few years before, but I had been rendered more sensitive than most to the arguments of rational moderates (such as Walter Lippmann and Hans Morgenthau) that it would be the sheerest folly for the United States to repeat the disastrous experience of the French in Indochina.

At the outset, my anti-war speeches and writings were naive appeals to rationality. Later, as it became increasingly obvious that folly would for some time prevail, I wished to establish why. My first researches, heavily influenced by my friend and sometime coauthor Franz Schurmann, focused on bureaucratic intrigue and in-fighting, as reflected in Chapter 2 of this book. My later essays, beginning with the final chapters of *The War Conspiracy* (1972), went behind bureaucratic rigidities and conflicts to the competing economic interests underlying them. Above all they looked at the tension between those interested in stabilizing the U.S. domestic economy and balance of payments, and those (particularly some U.S. oil companies) interested in providing a secure shield for U.S. investment in Southeast Asia—and particularly the development of offshore oil in Indonesian and other waters of the South China Sea. This in turn led to increasing focus on the symbiosis between governments (and in particular their intelligence agencies) and criminal associations, particularly drug traffickers, in the stabilization of right-wing terror in Vietnam, Italy, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and other parts of the world. This focus was increasingly documented by revelations in the 1970s and 1980s about the “strategy of tension,” whereby government intelligence agencies, working in international conjunction, strengthened the case for their survival by actually fomenting violence, recurring in alliance with drug-trafficking elements.<sup>8</sup>

Dishonesty, manipulation, and even self-deception are widespread in our nominal political democracy. So little of what really goes on is acknowledged that the notion of deep politics as earlier defined, “political practices and arrangements that are usually repressed rather than ac-

knowledge,” needs to be defined more fully. I will henceforth use *deep political analysis* to refer to the progress in research I have just described, looking beneath public formulations of policy issues to the bureaucratic, economic, and ultimately covert and criminal activities which underlie them.

## STRUCTURALIST REJECTION OF “CONSPIRACY THEORIES”

My experience has been that the degree of psychological resistance to and denial of each of these levels increases geometrically. Bureaucratic struggles, even when not officially acknowledged, could (I learned personally) be discussed in mainstream journals like the *New York Review of Books*. My articles which focused on underlying economic motives for U.S. intervention were denied such outlets, but could still be published in journals like the *Nation*, or what I have since come to think of as the establishment left. But even the *Nation* is fiercely hostile to the notion that criminal interventions, such as the assassination of President Kennedy, can themselves be part of the system or process by which we are governed.<sup>9</sup> Analyzing U.S. foreign policy in the midst of the Vietnam War, Gabriel Kolko spoke for this establishment left when he wrote that “a ruling class makes its policies operate” through a pervasive “business-defined consensus,” and that “to understand this essential fact is also to reject conspiracy theories.”<sup>10</sup>

Underlying this resistance is I believe the legacy of the Enlightenment that has left us in this century with the unattractive choices of academic social science and scientific socialism. The rationalistic structuralism of both resists “conspiracy theories,” which, in the words of Alexander Cockburn, undermine “any sensible analysis of institutions, economic trends and pressures, continuities in corporate and class interest and all the other elements constituting the open secrets and agendas of American capitalism.”<sup>11</sup>

The same resistance has been expressed more moderately by G. William Domhoff, a sociologist whose analyses of the American ruling class heavily influenced my own economic essays. Domhoff concedes that

if “conspiracy” means that these men are aware of their interests, know each other personally, meet together privately and off the record, and try to ham-

mer out a consensus on how to anticipate and react to events and issues, then there is some conspiring that goes on in CFR, not to mention the Committee for Economic Development, the Business Council, the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>12</sup>

But Domhoff shares Cockburn's resistance to the idea that an assassination conspiracy could have had a lasting impact on our political arrangements: "We all have a tremendous tendency to want to get caught up in believing that there's some secret evil cause for all of the obvious ills of the world." Conspiracy theories "encourage a belief that if we get rid of a few bad people, everything would be well in the world."<sup>13</sup>

I should make it clear that I propose deep political analysis of the Kennedy assassination not as a substitute or alternative to the structural analysis desired by Cockburn and Domhoff but as an extension of it. I have always believed, and argued, that a true understanding of the Kennedy assassination will lead, not to "a few bad people," but to the institutional and parapolitical arrangements which constitute the way we are systematically governed. The conspiracies I see as operative, in other words, are part of our political structure, not exceptions to it.

This was the natural course and conclusion of my Vietnam researches, as I collected them into essay-chapters for my 1972 book *The War Conspiracy*. That book, like my subsequent researches, began with bureaucratic demystifications, and proceeded, via economic analysis, to a closer look at the power role in Southeast Asia exercised by organized crime and the international drug traffic. I explained my title, *The War Conspiracy*, to

mean the sustained resort to collusion and conspiracy, unauthorized provocations, and fraud by US personnel, particularly intelligence personnel, in order to sustain or increase our military commitment in Asia. . . . War conspiracy itself is as much a symptom as a cause of the war mentality it furthers, for where the management and censorship of the news are commonplace, the manipulation and outright invention of it are invited. The war conspiracy is to be seen as a general syndrome, not . . . [a] private cabal.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, my own analysis at this stage was primarily parapolitical, rather than the deep political analysis which would have frankly accepted the extent to which the drug traffic was more than simply a conscious device of imperialistic control.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESISTANCE TO DEALING WITH THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

Today I have come to recognize that the structural arrangements which incorporate organized crime and the drug traffic into imperial systems are not all parapolitical stratagems designed by those in power. My emphasis in this book, in other words, is more on deep politics, as well as on the parapolitical exploitation of them. Speaking more generally, irrational forces, which have always been there, must be included as part of our social structure. But to say this, of course, is to redefine the notion of structure, as less rational, and hence less amenable to a rational takeover, than Marxists once believed.

So powerful indeed is the resistance to acknowledging a successful assassination conspiracy that we should admit that such resistance is not just ideological, it is also affective. The notion that unreason as well as reason rules us from above is psychologically painful. This intolerance has given rise to the consoling world-views of religions, literature, and more recently enlightenment structuralism. One has perhaps to have dealt seriously with the Kennedy assassination to be aware just how intense is the resistance to discussing it, on both the personal and the institutional level.

Consider, for example, the impressive, indeed ground-breaking, biography of J. Edgar Hoover by Athan Theoharis and John Stuart Cox.<sup>15</sup> Although the book devotes much attention to Hoover's illegal COINTELPRO programs against the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and other left-wing groups, the book does not mention the outcome of what may have been Hoover's only fully successful COINTELPRO: how the FPCC, shattered by the disclosure of Oswald's unsolicited activities for it, decided to close itself down. Indeed the book says not one word about Oswald, Ruby, and the Kennedy assassination, although Hoover played a crucial role in protecting the assassins (see Chapter 3); and murder, even of a President, should surely be considered a form of oppression.<sup>16</sup>

This central omission in Theoharis's excellent study is the more glaring because Theoharis accurately describes Hoover's bias in favor of Johnson over Kennedy before and after the assassination, including "Hoover's and Johnson's shared interests in purging the Justice Department of Kennedy loyalists [which] continued after the November 1964

presidential election.” The assassination itself, however, is treated as “fate in the guise of an assassin,” almost as an act of God.<sup>17</sup>

One can appreciate his dilemma: with enough controversial revelations about Hoover’s other illegal activities, Theoharis did not wish needlessly to challenge reader resistance and thus marginalize his standing as a social critic. By the same token, Hoover’s treatment of Ethel Rosenberg, an egregious instance of inquisition, is not discussed at all.

The result is a distortion of the Hoover legacy, and a continued repression of its worst features. One must turn to the more recent Hoover biography by Curt Gentry to learn that Ethel Rosenberg was very likely indicted and convicted on faked evidence, as part of an FBI stratagem to get her husband, and that the Dostoevskian perpetrators of this judicial murder were FBI officials Hoover, Alan Belmont, and William Branigan, precisely the team (as we shall see in Chapter 4) that Hoover contrived to put in charge of the Kennedy assassination investigation.<sup>18</sup>

This resistance to raising the awkward topic of the assassination is so great that it spills over into technically unrelated areas. A flagrant example is that treated in my next chapter: the significant change in U.S. Vietnam policy after the assassination of President Kennedy. This change in policy ought to be treated as a factual question, and separated in our minds from the assassination, about which, by itself, it tells us nothing. (That is, the policy change is a fact, even if Kennedy had been killed by a lone nut, or for that matter by a falling meteorite.)

But the change has not been so treated. On the contrary, a significant hiatus in Vietnam documentation has emerged for the months of November and December 1963, precisely the period in which America made the initial shift from an advisory to a combat role. This hiatus first occurred in the Pentagon documents and studies compiled for the Defense Department under Secretary Robert McNamara in the late 1960s, and then released to the *New York Times* (as the Pentagon Papers) in 1971. This understandable hiatus can be explained as a normal bureaucratic phenomenon: those analyzing policy inside the Johnson Administration were unlikely to admit (even to themselves) that the policy they had been implementing was in part the consequence of a presidential murder.

But the resistance, denial, and cover-up of this fact have not died away with time. On the contrary, they have increased, climaxing as I write with the frenzied media reaction to the use of two high-level Na-

tional Security Action Memoranda on Vietnam (NSAMs 263 and 273 of 1963) in Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*. It will be interesting to watch the critical response to the new scholarly history, *JFK and Vietnam* by John Newman, which documents this policy change with meticulous scholarship.

The success and thoroughness of Newman's demonstration point to an anomalous feature of preceding Vietnam histories. In 1971–72 the Pentagon Papers were published, along with my comparison (based on them) between Kennedy's last Vietnam policy statement and Johnson's first one, NSAMs 263 and 273. Thus it was now in the public record that in October 1963 Kennedy had authorized the implementation of a plan to withdraw 1,000 troops from Vietnam in 1963, and that in November Johnson had quietly replaced this by secret planning for U.S. escalation.

Nothing about any of this will be found in the 750 pages of Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* (1983), which skip from the Diem coup (November 1, 1963) to the situation in late December. William J. Rust's *Kennedy in Vietnam* (1985), despite its subject, is silent about NSAM 263 and the troop-withdrawal plan, although it does underline the importance of the commitment to win made by Johnson's NSAM 273.<sup>19</sup>

George Kahin's *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (1986) is perhaps the most significant example of this hiatus, not just because it is so carefully and exhaustively compiled, but because he himself is aware of the bureaucratic bias in the Pentagon Papers, and draws attention to it in his own, divergent narration. His historical account notes (correctly) that plans for phased withdrawal of U.S. troops were approved generally in March 1963 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who directed in May that "a plan for the withdrawal of about 1,000 U.S. troops before the end of the year should be developed."<sup>20</sup> Yet there is nothing about the implementation of the plan in October, or what happened to the plan after that. His explanation to me for the omission is that "I probably was influenced by what others had written on the subject."<sup>21</sup>

This explanation appears to contain an inversion that is both curious and instructive. Much more plausibly, it was what people had *not* written that influenced Professor Kahin. Earlier histories had marginalized the issue of the implementation and annulment of the withdrawal plan by not discussing it, by avoiding it, and thus leaving it to be speculated

upon in the sub-literature circulating about the Kennedy assassination. The marginality of this sub-literature is usually apparent from its out-of-the-mainstream publishers. The subject, in short, had become controversial, and indecorous.

## THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Unfortunately it is hard for me to address this subject disinterestedly, since I am often the source cited in the assassination sub-literature.<sup>22</sup> But what I see is the phenomenon of a paradigm shift as discussed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Paradigms, Kuhn wrote, “determine large areas of experience at the same time.” Evidence challenging that paradigm tends to be suppressed, the more so as the extant paradigm becomes codified in textbooks. Eventually the accumulation of enough anomalous evidence produces a competing paradigm, but one shared by a new population in poor communication with the old one: “the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds.” Kuhn notes the resistance that arises to the new paradigm, “particularly from those whose productive careers have committed them to an older tradition.” And he quotes from Max Planck that “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”<sup>23</sup>

If such resistance and discontinuous progress can prevail in the realm of science, how much more so in the realm of history, where the psychological and social investment in continuity and rational evolution (and hence in resistance to counterevidence) is so much greater. Most readers may resist the notion that interpretations of the Kennedy assassination, and of circumambient events such as the change in Vietnam policy, are central and profound enough to be called paradigmatic. But as a foreigner who lived through it, I could not but observe the depth and centrality of everyone’s response to the assassination of the President. How one saw that assassination affected, and was affected by, how one interpreted the rest of the world.

It is certainly true, as the establishment press reiterates from time to time, that many people are psychologically disposed to conspiratorial explanations for events like political murder. Many leftists repeat this

cliché, adding that conspiratorial explanations allow people to externalize evil and separate it from the political system under which they live. Such psychological explanations can be put forward in an open-minded and truth-seeking spirit, but only if their proponents concede that the opposite is also true. That is, many people, particularly those whose productive careers have prospered under the status quo, are equally disposed on psychological grounds to reject conspiratorial explanations for events that affect the legitimacy of the society they live in. For some years, whenever I have been treated to a short sermon about the paranoid style in American politics, I have asked the preacher if he (it is never a she) did not recognize the psychological grounds for his anti-conspiratorial position as well. Few do.

And yet the evidence is there: not just with respect to the central event of the assassination itself, but with much smaller, ancillary matters, such as the repression and denial of the Vietnam policy change which occurred in the same time period. What is at stake here is a competition between paradigms of how politics works. One is the establishment paradigm, codified in textbooks and taught in universities as “political science,” whether pluralist or Marxist: this sees politics as a system of overtly identified interactive forces, and offers an inclusive chart of political behavior in which, for example, there is little or no room for assassinations.

#### ALTERNATIVES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT MODEL OF GOVERNMENT

At present there is more than one alternative to this establishment model. What I propose as a competing paradigm, that of deep politics, is certainly not the most commonly encountered alternative. Many more people, convinced that overt politics is not the true arena of power, postulate a kind of Satanic reflection of it. Thus they talk reactively of some unified “shadow government,” “invisible government,” or “secret team.”

Unified “shadow” models are, in my experience, usually based less on research than on reactions to the resistance and denial which have been observed with regard to sensitive topics, such as the political assassinations in this country, or the CIA, or elite institutions such as the Council on Foreign Relations, or the drug traffic. The moment one be-

gins to gather extensive data on any one aspect of deep politics, such as organized crime, it is only too easy to pass from one extreme reception of it, the systematic underacknowledgment of its power, to its opposite, and to conclude that one has found the key to all political mysteries. Actually, shadow-government theories, by their very totalizing, do not seriously challenge the most sensitive feature of the conventional power paradigm. This is the belief that overt politics and deep politics have little to do with each other, a belief in which establishment media, hyperstructuralist Marxists, and even shadow-government conspiratorialists, all paradoxically concur.

The deep-politics paradigm, in contrast, attempts to go beyond all such restricted, unified explanations. It is essentially an extension of conventional political investigative methods to consideration of a much larger field of evidence, including, but not restricted to, the unacknowledged processes and events which conventional decorum excludes from our current "political science" textbooks. By thus examining overt events in this larger field of deep political arrangements, it breaks down the distinction between overt and covert power, and thereby hopefully avoids the frequently asked question: Which forces are in control, the public or shadow powers?

It also responds to those who object that no conspiracy to kill the President could have remained a secret for so long in a society as open as America's. We shall see in this book that beneath the open surface of our society lie connections and relationships of long standing, virtually immune to disclosure, and capable of great crimes, including serial murder. To the stock objection that it would be virtually impossible to assemble a murder conspiracy without leakage, the response is that an existing conspiratorial network or system of networks, already in place and capable of murder, would have much less difficulty in maintaining the discipline of secrecy.

I shall focus on the intelligence-sanctioned international narcotics network as a candidate for such a conspiracy, because of the involvement, directly or indirectly, of so many relevant players. The drug traffic, when we look at it more closely, will be seen to consist of overlapping networks, relating official to private power through collusion and corruption.

We shall see that a key reason to suspect drug involvement in the assassination is the sustained effort of administration and congressional

officials, in 1964 and again in 1978, to conceal the extent of Jack Ruby's involvement with both drug traffickers and law enforcement. I have not assumed, and certainly cannot prove, that this network arranged the assassination. I suspect, however, that the need to keep this particular secret helped explain the cover-up, particularly with respect to Ruby, even if the other principals were only indirectly related to it.

This book analyzes diverse forms of deep politics and parapolitics, acknowledging the historical relevance of splits within bureaucracies, within economic systems, and within the clumsily named phenomenon of organized crime. In other words, the model for deep politics put forward in these pages, although aiming at a more integrative view of politics than the conventional model, is also roughly pluralistic both above, in the public arena, and also below. Above all, the fact that an area of political activity (such as CIA covert operations) is unacknowledged, or even actively suppressed, should not lead us, reactively, to exaggerate its importance. That these pages focus on areas of facts usually unacknowledged or denied does not mean that I believe them to be the determinant areas or facts of our political life; only that fuller understanding of our politics, toward the goal of public control of political life, requires a fuller understanding of these areas as of others.

The common method in these chapters is to look at areas where there is such resistance and denial. The findings I reach in them are still too scattered and incomplete to be labeled a competing paradigm. What I put forward here is not a new system, but only a method. And if I apply it to the Kennedy assassination, the goal is not so much to solve that beleaguered case as to better understand the society that engendered it.

#### A DEEP POLITICAL READING OF THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

The Warren Commission investigation of the murder of John F. Kennedy, however unsatisfactory it may have been, at least released an unprecedented flood of FBI and other official documentation surrounding both Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby. Most researchers who have pored over this evidence have done so for the narrow purpose of "solving" the case, in the sense of establishing "Who did it?" This goal has proven difficult to achieve, especially as the hottest clues have been recurringly neutralized by still more new and contradictory evidence.

The same documentation proves much more fruitful if we study it not to pinpoint assassins but to understand more about the deep politics of this country, the ongoing, unacknowledged processes linking so-called legitimate political and economic activities to their criminal underpinnings. Both Ruby and Oswald, when studied in this broader political context, emerge as operators within the world where political and criminal activities interface. By studying them, we learn more about the assassination and its political context. We also learn more about the deep involvement of criminals in the deep political processes of our country.

We learn more, finally, about how and why the whole question of “organized crime,” and above all the so-called Cosa Nostra, has been systematically misrepresented by law enforcement investigators and prosecutors. For this active misrepresentation has deformed the two official investigations into the Kennedy assassination itself, not in marginal ways, but so as to conceal central truths about the assassination, truths that were embarrassing to those conducting the investigation. In the end one comes to recognize that the history of organized crime and the history of the investigation and prosecution of organized crime are closely intertwined processes affecting one another. Processes, one must add, which mutually affect the true, but concealed, seats of political power in this country.

It is now recognized that the Warren Commission investigation was a deformed one. A recent history of the CIA notes that, “as historians would comment,” the Warren Commission’s most active member, Allen Dulles, “blanked out whenever the discussion touched Castro,” because of his unwillingness to let the Commission’s investigation get into a most pertinent project, the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro.<sup>24</sup> Robert Blakey, general counsel for the second official investigation, the House Select Committee on Assassinations, documents in his book how the Warren Commission investigation was deflected from the CIA-Mafia plots.<sup>25</sup>

But Allen Dulles was far from the only Warren Commission member with a special turf to protect. A true examination of Lee Harvey Oswald and his family would have led to the influence of New Orleans mob figure Carlos Marcello on Louisiana Democratic party politics; but somehow, with the presence on the Commission of Louisiana Congressman Hale Boggs (himself deeply indebted to Marcello for help on

his political campaigns), this never happened.<sup>26</sup> One of the Commission's senior counsels, Albert Jenner, was a Chicago attorney with a history of representing figures, such as Allen Dorfman, from Ruby's milieu. In the 1970s he would even represent one of the men (Irwin Weiner) who had been phoned by Jack Ruby.<sup>27</sup> Jenner in 1963 was counsel for General Dynamics, which, as we shall see, was at the time deeply embroiled in a series of Texas-based scandals being exposed by the Kennedys, and should perhaps have been under investigation itself.

Few informed observers would now doubt that the purpose of the Warren Commission was not to find out who killed the President; as we shall see in Chapter 3, the purpose was damage control. Even the second official investigation, that of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, had to conclude that the performance of the Warren Commission, which "acted in good faith," "was in fact flawed":

Virtually all former Warren Commission members and staff contacted by the [House] committee said they regarded the CIA-Mafia plots against Fidel Castro to be the most important information withheld from the Commission. They all agreed that an awareness of the plots would have led to significant new areas of investigation and would have altered the general approach of the investigation. (AR 258)

Among the deficiencies the Committee identified in the Warren Commission's performance were "Oswald's activities and associations during the periods he lived in New Orleans," and "the background, activities, and associations of Jack Ruby, particularly with regard to organized crime" (AR 260). The Committee was quite right to identify these areas; and, to its credit, shared much previously suppressed information with the public.

Despite this, after a decade of reflection, I have come to the troubled conclusion that, at bottom, the House Committee investigation, like the Warren Commission's, was also seriously flawed. And for the same reason: despite some excellent individual performances, the search for the truth was still limited by the need for damage control.

Later I shall have kinder and more exculpatory things to say about the House Committee investigation. But I should say at the outset that the errors and distortions to be found in its report mostly do not originate with the Committee, but are transmitted as part of an evidentiary record which had been distorted or falsified much earlier, some of it by the FBI.<sup>28</sup> The methodological problems of working with falsified evi-

dence are immense, as I shall discuss in Chapter 4, and the House Committee's work should therefore be appreciated for the many ways in which it definitely has advanced our understanding.

This book has been distorted by the same problem. I have avoided major topics to which I earlier attached great importance, such as Oswald's visit to the Soviet Union, because of the unresolved issues pertaining to such relevant evidence as the Defense Department's reports of Oswald's service record.<sup>29</sup> Unlike some other authors, I have also been wary of new witnesses who have come forward. In 1977 I did a film for television with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; and, long before this project became common knowledge, we almost instantly had one such new witness, a French-speaking Québécois who claimed to have known Oswald. His story quickly collapsed during our interrogation; I learned from it, however, that the problem of falsification is an ongoing one.

To sum up: official investigations of the Kennedy assassination have failed, not because the case is inherently insoluble, but because both the case and the investigations have been governed by deeper political processes, which have not yet been discerned.

These forces are still with us, and they are not benign. Much has been made of the number of witnesses who were murdered or wounded at the time of the Kennedy assassination.<sup>30</sup> To the twenty-one or more who are supposed to have died violent deaths during the Warren Commission investigation, Anthony Summers adds a supplementary list of sixteen, who died at the time of the Garrison investigation of 1967, Church Committee investigation of 1975–76, and House Committee investigation of 1977–78.<sup>31</sup> Some of the names in the secondary list are far more prominent than any in the first. We shall see that at least two of the murders, of mobsters Sam Giancana and John Rosselli, have been said by credible informants to have been occasioned by their testimony to the Church Committee, pending or just delivered, about the Kennedy assassination.

## THE KENNEDY CASE AGAIN? WHY BOTHER?

Let me conclude with a brief articulation of my personal political beliefs as to why deep political analysis of events such as the Kennedy assassination is useful. This book is written in an age of declining belief

in Enlightenment, when grandiose designs for political change, such as socialism or communism, have in most cases been thrust aside.

The shadow of the unsolved Kennedy case has only increased the skepticism of many as to reason's ability to address major social events. Even among former assassination researchers, one finds the cynical assumption that the more important a political mystery, the less likely we are to learn the truth behind it. The response of Bob Katz, who spent nearly ten years in the 1970s working on the Kennedy assassination, spoke for many of the Chilled Generation when he wrote that "the truth in this case lies buried forever. The Unsolved Murder of the Century has entered the realm of myth."<sup>32</sup>

What has failed here, in my view, is not human rationality itself, but that imperfect ideological crystalization of it which we call the Enlightenment. Both Marx and Weber, following Hegel, hypostatized rationality and neglected competing factors in history. Others, acting in the opposite direction, have hypostatized the irrational, or (in the case of the later Freud) the return of the repressed.

The defect here has not been that of rationality, but only of the historic ideologies put forward in reason's name. In my poetry I take issue with the Enlightenment contempt for poetry and religion; I propose that, in the spirit of Dante or the *Tao Te Ching*, we should move instead toward a deeper Enmindment that respects the truths of darkness, as well as those of light.

Deep political analysis is one specific attempt at enmindment in the political area. It grounds the processes for political change in a larger context less amenable to control, not to reject the inspiring vision of change, but to render it more possible. In the case of the Vietnam War, I now concede that it was naive, or what I call the cognitive fallacy, to believe that that intervention could have been prevented simply by publishing facts such as those in this book. However, I still believe that better understanding of history can better prepare us for change, and thus contribute to a better future.

This book is an act of faith, not just in history but in America. Jungian psychologists write of the buried shadow in the psyche, the repository for repressed unpleasantness. In a sense this book is about the collective shadow, or shadows, of America. Good citizens will rightly feel, as they read, that this is not the whole story of America, that I am leav-

ing out the good side. This is true. No one can write the complete book of America, and this one is too long already.

But psychologists explore shadows, not because they prefer darkness, but because they believe that healing can come from an enlargement of insight. Obviously the only justification for this book is a similar optimism. If America were no more than its shadows depicted here, logic and common sense would rule out the writing and publication of this book.

Just as there is more to life than logic, there is more to America than its shadows. I believe that America, for all its shortcomings and present difficulties, is still an unusually open society, where it is still possible to strive for even greater openness and justice. This book is an appeal to America's residue of humanity, an appeal based more on faith than on logic.

Consider for a moment the contrary situation prevailing in eastern Europe. No one there could write and publish about the monstrosities of Stalinism, until Stalin was dead. Years later, after the collapse of the Soviet empire, survivors reproached themselves for not having criticized their regimes more severely and candidly. They had been silent because they thought to protect the ideals of socialism, and later recognized that by their silence they had contributed passively to the corruption of those ideals.

One should not expect too much from merely exposing and understanding the corruption of our society. The original investigation of Watergate, as we shall see in Chapter 14, did not get to the heart of the matter and had only limited results. And yet, at a time when America was disengaging from Vietnam, one fallout from the Watergate inquiries was the partial scaling back of an oppressive domestic security apparatus which had become anachronistic. Now, with the closing down of the Cold War, one can hope that a further scaling back might result from even partial disclosures of bureaucratic responsibility for what happened in 1963.

# Kennedy, Johnson, and Vietnam

## *A Tale of Two NSAMs*

Whatever is done against Vietnam will be felt in America too. . . . I can predict to you all that the story in Vietnam is only at its beginning.

*Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, November 2, 1963*

### NSAM 263 AND NSAM 273

While there were undoubtedly fictions in Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*, many critics at the time of its release in 1991 concentrated on denying two of Stone's incontrovertible facts. The first was that in late 1963 Kennedy had authorized an initial withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam, as the first step of a pull-out to be substantially completed by the end of 1965. The second was that, in a high-level meeting right after Kennedy's murder, Johnson redirected U.S. Vietnam policy from this graduated disengagement to graduated escalation.<sup>1</sup>

These divergent decisions were encoded in two divergent National Security Action Memoranda, NSAMs 263 and 273. NSAM 263 of October 11, 1963, was Kennedy's last NSAM policy directive on Vietnam. NSAM 273 of November 26, 1963, dated four days after the assassination, was Johnson's first. The two NSAMs (once pronounced "nas-sums," now usually "ensams") were flashed in the Stone movie, but only for about six seconds. These six seconds engendered an intense counterattack in the establishment press. The subject is indeed sensitive, even explosive.

The language of both documents was convoluted and misleading, but for different reasons. NSAM 273 was partly designed to reassure an anguished nation that murder and/or conspiracy had not changed national policy, whether or not it had. To this day, many leading critics of