



# **Dallas Forever Changed**

**The Legacy of  
November 1963**

**Dan Helpingstine**

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Fifty years after Pres. John F. Kennedy was assassinated near Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, the specter of his death haunted the city still. The mayoral commemoration committee tightly controlled every aspect of the day's events, angering many assassination researchers. The two groups neatly represented Dallas's schizophrenic struggle: city officials sought healing through their focus on JFK's life and legacy, minimizing his murder and the pall it cast over the city; assassination researchers believed healing would come from answers to the many questions raised by numerous reports, commissions, and investigations.

Author Dan Helpingstine charts the evolution of these two paths from the day JFK died through the fiftieth anniversary commemoration. He speaks with individuals whose lives were irrevocably altered and delves into historical and contemporary media coverage of Dallas and its residents. From Dallas's cultural and athletic triumphs to its continuing efforts to move beyond its image as "the city that killed Kennedy," Helpingstine sensitively probes the lasting legacy of JFK's assassination.

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*To all those who seek the truth regarding the assassination of President  
John F. Kennedy*





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## Preface

I believe there was a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy. I do not know the exact nature of that conspiracy. I am even open to the possibility that Lee Oswald acted alone.

Whether a conspiracy existed or not is not the focus of this book. My admission only serves as a disclosure. No matter how objective a journalist attempts to be, everyone has a personal viewpoint, and for honesty sake, I want mine known. And when dealing with President Kennedy's murder or its after-effects, I believe this disclosure is extremely important.

What this book does concentrate on is the after-shock Dallas felt following the assassination. In examining that phenomenon, one cannot ignore the controversies about what exactly happened in Dallas that awful Friday. Those controversies, after all, have contributed to the historical and political gridlock Dallas continues to experience since then.

It is my opinion that if there had been a clearer consensus of who really killed President Kennedy, the city would have healed quicker and would have been able to distance itself from this tragedy in a more tangible way. I also think that Dallas would always be connected to an assassination history and debate under any circumstances.

**It is also my opinion that political assassinations**, even those performed by lone nuts, do not happen in a vacuum. Assassins, while not to be absolved of guilt, cannot be singled out as aberrations with no connection to functional society. So, if Lee Oswald did act alone, he shouldn't be scapegoated. Dallas shouldn't be either.

This book will examine the political climate of the country in the early sixties. I was too young at the time to fully realize what was occurring when John Kennedy was president. Yet I as researched this book, I could almost feel the fear and anxiety. Americans didn't merely worry about a fluctuating economy or if their children went to good schools—they feared for their lives. Fascism had been conquered in World War II only to be replaced by Communism, and Americans looked at Communism

as a deeper and more direct threat. In fact, it was viewed as a threat not only to our way of life but to our very existence. Many, including a great number in Dallas, questioned if John Kennedy understood the seriousness of this threat. Some even wondered if he was a true patriot.

Naturally the assassination shook and shocked the country. However, considering the intense political and social climate of the early sixties, it would have been somewhat shocking if John Kennedy had actually survived his presidency. He was an established politician yet he never would have been elected president if he hadn't been in the political mainstream. Kennedy was looked upon as a symbol of the protest and unrest of the decade. So, at least to some, he was viewed as a threat to the status quo like any civil rights activist or anti-war demonstrator. And some viewed people from either group as anti-American.

Now imagine this: The president visits your hometown and is killed in your midst. Then in the ensuing years and decades, thousands of books are written about the tragedy. The crime is described in detail over and over with the constant descriptions of blood and brain matter splattered on the street. In addition to the words, thousands of photos are published, photos of the dead president on his autopsy table, photos of his dead alleged assassin and post-mortem x-rays showing bullet fragments and terrible wounds. Along with these images, disturbing as they are, is an amateur film showing the actual murder that only leaves the viewer gasping from shock. And no matter how you want to makeover the image of your city, no matter how you want to change for the better, you are not only identified with the crime, but you are blamed for that crime and then are attacked for who and what you are.

This has been Dallas for over fifty years.

**Imagine the political aftermath.** An official inquiry seems more like a whitewash than an investigation. Then recall government deception about Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Iraq. Just how many times was the country lied to or deceived? And lied to about important things, not stains on a dress. Although political intrigue is as old as civilization, it sometimes seems like it all started on November 22, 1963. This is what the country has experienced for the past 50 plus years.

Americans, who were alive at the time of the assassination, vividly recall where they were when they heard the news. An additional premise of this book is that no longer matters. What really truly matters is how we have moved forward and how we continue to move forward. And that story, for both Dallas and the country, is in many ways more tragic than the assassination itself.

## Acknowledgments

No writer can complete a book without some kind of assistance. The concept of someone merely locking himself up in a room and putting a book together is false and outdated. While there is some isolation in the creative process, a writer, especially when doing a book like this one, must be a social animal. I needed help and cooperation from a variety of people.

Specifically, I'd like to thank Librarian Krishna Shenoy of the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza. Mrs. Shenoy works in the research room at the Sixth Floor and was a great help in assisting me. She conducted herself in a professional manner always.

Receiving feedback is always important when doing a project such as this one. I am appreciative to friend and fellow writer Sharon Ginsky for her valuable input. Even when criticizing, she believed in my work, and that helped my own confidence. Most importantly, I knew her suggestions and analysis were done in an honest manner, and that greatly helped when dissecting my work. Additionally, I am grateful to editor Vince Hyman for helping me clean up a rough manuscript.

I would also like to thank the people who agreed to be interviewed for the book. Normal research can only do so much. Talking to people who had direct or a tangential connection to the assassination provides valuable and personal insights that could not be obtained otherwise.

Sometimes, I ended up not directly using information gleaned from an interview. In these instances, I received valuable information and this background assisted me in putting the book together. One specific interviewee was Southern Methodist University Political Science Professor Dennis Simon. Simon heads a "pilgrimage" with SMU students who visit Southern cities where significant civil rights history occurred. In studying events during the Kennedy administration and afterward, students travel to cities like Little Rock, Selma, Montgomery, and Memphis to see where major events took place. (Much like people who still come to Dallas.) Simon spoke about the emotional impact of the trip and how Dallas and the South have attempted to deal with its civil rights legacy.

And, as in all my writing projects, I appreciate my wife Delia and daughter Leah who provided much needed emotional encouragement and support.

# Part 1

## Setting the Scene

The scene was set in Dallas long before John Kennedy visited there on November 22, 1963. During the immediate post-World War II era, the country had struggled as it tried to find and identify its Cold War posture. We had reached a consensus to have a strong and united front to combat the Soviet Union.

We also tried to cope with a new fear, a fear that the world could destroy itself. Americans worried about a world-ending catastrophe if the country wasn't vigilant enough or that it may also occur if we provoked a confrontation that would lead to a most different kind of war.

America turned to charismatic leaders. Amid nuclear nightmares, people had the strongest need to feel safe.

The country looked to John Kennedy and others to be respected father-figures who somehow had the wisdom to make all the right decisions. Then maybe the nightmares could all go away.

Instead, a living nightmare unfolded in Dallas.





# Chapter 1

## Dallas: City of Hate

*“Kennedy will get his reward in hell. Stevenson is going to die. His heart will stop, stop, stop, and he will burn, burn, burn”<sup>1</sup>*

—Chants thrown at United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson after a Dallas speech almost one month before the assassination of President Kennedy. Stevenson was hit with a poster and spat on as well.

*“No one can say Dallas doesn’t love and respect you, Mr. President.”<sup>2</sup>*

—Nellie Connally, wife of Texas Gov. John Connally. Mrs. Connally spoke these words right before President Kennedy and Connally were shot.

*“You’ve taught us to loathe the lowly ignorance of your citizens—to loathe your lack of national respect and to loathe your complete absence of pride for your own country.”*

—Hate letter sent to Dallas after the assassination

*“Who died and made you Elvis?”<sup>3</sup>*

—*Dallas Observer* writer Jim Schutze’s barb directed at Dallas Mike Rawlings regarding the city’s planning of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of President Kennedy’s assassination

Author Joe McBride was 15 when John Kennedy was killed. McBride was attending a Milwaukee Catholic high school and had worked as a young volunteer for Kennedy during the 1960 Wisconsin Primary. McBride had the occasion to meet the candidate and was able to secure an autograph. McBride described Kennedy as an engaging man, and as an idealistic youngster, McBride strongly believed in the Massachusetts senator.

“I laughed when I heard President Kennedy was shot,” McBride wrote in his 2013 book, *Into the Nightmare*. “But when I saw the look on the face of the boy who told me, I realized he wasn’t joking.”<sup>4</sup>

McBride’s reaction was not unique. Many Americans laughed at first hearing the news, either from disbelief or shock. Both emotions remained for years to come.

In 1967, John Lennon, as large a symbol of the sixties as John Kennedy, hauntingly sang “A Day in the Life.” This song, which had a chilling 45-second piano chord at its end, relates an incident where a man laughs when hearing of a famous person’s violent death. The Lennon character reacts in the same shocking manner as Kennedy admirer Joe McBride had on November 22, 1963.

Ironically and tragically, Lennon would die as John Kennedy did. In December 1980, Lennon was shot in front of his New York City apartment and, as with Kennedy, didn’t live long after his wounding. The world was stunned as Lennon had just released a new album and was attempting a musical comeback. Naturally, his status as a former Beatle would always make him an important cultural figure. And Lennon was considered a political leader of sorts, both because of his music and his willingness to take public positions.

So what was the motive of Lennon’s assassin and just who was he?

Mark David Chapman would later say that at least one motive was fame. Chapman identified himself with Holden Caulfield, a fictional character in J D Salinger’s novel, *Catcher in the Rye*. Chapman, like Caulfield, was supposed to be a symbol of alienation in a world filled with corruption.

Chapman was sentenced to 25 years to life. In August 2013, he was denied parole for the seventh time. At 57 he no longer looked like a creepy, drug-using killer. Although he was considered a cooperative prisoner, Chapman was viewed as a person that could harm himself and others. He stayed in a maximum security prison.

In a sense, Chapman was the lone nut the community of Dallas wanted Lee Oswald to be.

“Although no one dared utter such a thought,” Darwin Payne wrote in his book, *Big D*, “a great feeling of relief arose that Lee Harvey Oswald had been a Marxist instead of a right-winger. A Marxist could not have been inspired by the ultra-conservatism that the city tolerated but already was beginning to feel guilty about.”<sup>5</sup>

Payne is a respected Dallas historian who was a reporter at the *Dallas Times Herald* at the time of the assassination. While he wrote that Dallas was secretly relieved that Lee Oswald was a leftist and social outsider, the media and local law enforcement officials trumpeted the theory that Oswald was the sole killer and he had been corrupted by his belief in Communism—just as Chapman allowed himself to be weirdly influenced by an iconic novel.

Dallas had one big problem in laying its collective community guilt on Oswald: in many ways, Lee Oswald was nothing like Mark Chapman.

Many who think Oswald was innocent regarding the assassination will admit that he was not a model citizen. The alleged assassin was also an alleged wife beater and absentee father who had a mixed military record. Others countered that Oswald was polite and cordial and one who didn’t like violence. There were people who liked Oswald and even thought he was somewhat articulate.

Then there is the matter of Oswald’s guilt, a convenient guilt for a city that had been accused of harboring political violence—and an intense hatred for John F. Kennedy.

Lee Oswald, in the strictest terms, must be called the alleged assassin. He never lived long enough to be tried, so he can’t be labeled as a convicted murderer like Mark Chapman is.

The Warren Commission, an investigative body appointed by President Lyndon Johnson, concluded that Oswald had alone killed the president. However, that conclusion, has been challenged by many, and this included Dallas chief of police Jesse Curry. It’s a conclusion that essentially remains the official position of the United States government despite a somewhat different conclusion made by the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1979.

“We don’t have proof that Oswald fired a rifle and never did,” Curry told the *Dallas Morning News* in 1969. “Nobody’s yet been able to put him up in that building with a gun in his hand.”<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of Oswald's purported guilt or innocence, many Dallasites have defended their town over the years. There is Nellie Connally's famous statement that came as a result of the reception the city gave the president. According to Dallas historian A. C. Greene, the accusation that Dallas hated President Kennedy was flat-out wrong, and the alleged political extremism in the city was greatly exaggerated.

"The truth was that Dallas never really hated John F. Kennedy," Greene wrote in his book, *Dallas USA*, released almost 20 years after the assassination. "President Kennedy, in fact, had been in Dallas some months before the trip, visiting Sam Rayburn as the aging Speaker of the House lay dying in a Baylor hospital. Although not widely heralded, the visit did not take place in secret, and thousands of Dallas residents expressed their support and friendship for JFK even on that brief instance."<sup>7</sup>

However, a black-bordered advertisement ran in the *Dallas Morning News* the day Kennedy arrived. "WELCOME, MR. KENNEDY," it read—and it listed a number of grievances that accused the president of not acting in the country's interest, especially in national security.

Many residents, even Kennedy opponents, were embarrassed by the caustic advertisement that essentially labeled Kennedy a traitor. Many thought it should have never been run in the city's largest newspaper—or at least not run on the day Kennedy was in Dallas. On seeing the ad, Kennedy believed he was going into "nut country."

Historian Greene further discounted the importance of the advertisement. He wrote that the ad was the work of four people who were not native to Dallas, with no long-term ties to Dallas, having arrived only weeks before the assassination. Greene backed up his notion that these individuals were really nothing but transients, writing that they "disappeared from history after a few months of notoriety."<sup>8</sup> Along with this logic, Greene was convinced that another transient, Lee Oswald, had killed the president. So much for local extremism.

Texan Jim Marrs wrote *Crossfire—The Plot that Killed Kennedy* that was used in part to craft Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*. Dallas didn't come out too well in the movie. The Dallas cops were portrayed as either corrupt or incompetent. The movie implied that the Dallas power structure was in on the plot. Still, Marrs agreed with Greene that Dallas had been unfairly labeled as the city responsible for the death of a president.

“You can’t blame a whole city,” Marris said in a simple statement to the author in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

Marris recalled Ralph Yarborough’s memory of the Dallas motorcade. Yarborough, who sat with Vice President Lyndon Johnson several cars behind Kennedy, represented Texas in the US Senate from 1957-1971. Yarborough also represented political divisions in the state—he couldn’t stand Johnson or John Connally. But Yarborough agreed with the governor’s wife regarding the reception Kennedy had received from Dallas.

“There was a sea of happy faces,” Marris said, quoting Yarborough, who died in 1996. “People were happy and excited to see the Kennedys.”<sup>10</sup>

But then Marris recalled Yarborough looking up at many people in windows staring down at the motorcade and who didn’t appear to be happy to see the Kennedys.



In the immediate years after the assassination, Dallas still took a beating. As the traumas of the sixties unfolded, another unsettling feeling ran through the country. Again this was reflected in culture, and one example was the Rolling Stones song, “Sympathy for the Devil.”

“Sympathy for the Devil” is highly political. It begins with the singer taunting the listener, describing the main character in the song as able to live for an eternity and having played part in many key world historical events. Mick Jagger invites the listener to guess who the character is. Then he abruptly changes the subject and asks who was responsible for killing both John and Robert Kennedy. Suddenly becoming reflective, he sings that the guilt lies with everyone. Not simply Dallas or anything or person representing Dallas. After a string of assassinations during the sixties, a collective guilt seemed to take hold in the country. Although Dallas was still being targeted and blamed for one assassination, the sense of responsibility had been broadened.

“A lot of criticism of Dallas in the wake of the assassination was a nation looking in the mirror and not liking what it saw,” Dallas filmmaker Rob Tranchin told the *New York Times* in 1988. “When the sixties developed and the riots and the assassinations hit, a lot of people came to think, ‘Hey, it’s not Dallas. It’s us.’”<sup>11</sup>

As the seventies progressed, it seemed as if Dallas was finally recovering somewhat from the trauma of November 22, 1963. A local play about Jack Ruby ran during the early part of the decade and was quite popular. Dallas theatre goers were at least able to view a part of the city's painful history in an entertaining way.

The Dallas Cowboys, still a new and losing NFL franchise in 1963, became known as "America's Team." Although the Cowboys became a winning team with a nationwide following, the title didn't mean the team truly represented American values more than any other team. The Cowboys had been booed in the later stages of 1963, and now fans outside of Texas didn't seem to directly associate the Cowboys with the assassination.

Finally, there was the TV show *Dallas* which featured a rich family of characters most wouldn't want in their own family. The Ewings were self-absorbed, big-business backstabbers. Some Dallasites were even embarrassed by the program, but the show seemed to give the city a post-assassination facelift.

"The town seriously needed a new image," Jason Thurlkill wrote in June 2011. "It got one in a soap opera that revealed a city besieged by blonds, big hair and big homes. *Dallas*, which first appeared in 1978, did for Big D what *Sex in the City* and *Seinfeld* did for New York: It painted a portrait of the city for the world."<sup>12</sup>

A city, if one watched the TV show, where the assassination of John Kennedy had never happened or at least was not alluded to or mentioned.

Accompanying Thurlkill's article was a nighttime photo of the twenty-first century Dallas skyline. There was no sign of Dealey Plaza in the impressive image. An online comment from a reader agreed with Thurlkill in that Dallas was nothing like it was on November 22, 1963:

"Dallas has no doubt changed a lot since the original eighties TV show, as it has morphed into the quintessential American 'big' city with a large minority population, middle-class white flight, and a significant moneyed gentry class. The Dallas suburbs, such as Plano, Richardson, and Frisco, will be interesting to watch, as they have grown into major cities in their own right, and are becoming the region's most important employment centers. They are also ethnically diverse, as Asian immigrants have flocked to the tech-heavy businesses that have sprung up there."<sup>13</sup>

Diversity. Economic growth. A changing political environment and demographic that saw Dallas vote for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 even though it had widely rejected John Kennedy in 1960. In fact, some see support for Obama as a sort of vindication for Dallas as proof the community had distanced itself from the far right. From appearances, it also had seemed to distance itself from a tragic event that had scarred its reputation and traumatized its citizens.



Moving on historically was another matter. No matter how Dallas changed or evolved there still was one fact that could not be forgotten: John Kennedy was killed there in 1963. Influential Dallasites, amid controversy and intense emotions, helped create the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza.

In the ensuing years after the assassination, there were many in Dallas who wanted the old Texas School Book Depository building demolished. The building's sixth floor was believed by many to be the place where Lee Oswald had fired at the presidential motorcade. The building not only survived and now houses Dallas County offices and the sixth floor, first an exhibit, is now a museum of assassination artifacts and memories.

Dallas critics charged that the city had remained in denial of history. The museum itself has been criticized for the same thing, as some claim it is slanted toward the Oswald-did-it-alone theory. However, museum defenders maintain that the city has come to embrace the assassination as an historical event. Instead of people sending hate letters to city officials, they write messages on a log book that sits at the exit of the museum. Many messages, as least what the author has been able to read, demonstrate a show of emotional release, not angry slurs thrown at the city.



“Every so often,” Sixth Floor Museum Associate Curator Stephen Fagin wrote in his book, *Assassination and Commemoration*, “while

street vendors peddle their merchandise and theories, school groups eat sack lunches on the grassy knoll, teenagers rush into Elm Street to have their photo taken, and senior citizens appear lost in memory, someone leaves a bouquet or a rose atop the bronze historical plaque by the side of the street as downtown traffic rushes past. Year after year they come to his place of necessary pilgrimage—to mourn, to learn, to ponder.”<sup>14</sup>

Powerful words. Eloquent words. Words that support the notion that Dallas is coping and will never forget what happened on November 22, 1963. But with the existence of a museum and a city that has attempted to remake and improve itself, does this mean Dallas has fully come to terms with an event that will always help identify it? From observing the actions of its mayor and a committee formed to plan ceremonies observing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination, it can only be said that Dallas still has a long way to go.



I began writing this book when, at the end of May 2012, Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings announced the formation of the committee to oversee the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration in the next year. Before contacting his office, I decided to do some research on the history of the city. I contacted the public relations department at Southern Methodist University to arrange an interview with a political science faculty member. I wanted to learn more about the political climate in Dallas. The PR person was cordial. She helped arrange an interview with the professor a couple weeks later. In the course of the conversation, I casually mentioned that I had heard that one member of the mayor’s committee had a direct historical link to the assassination in that she sat on the grand jury that indicted Oswald’s murderer Jack Ruby. I stated I didn’t know who the person was but I understood she still felt sensitive about her legal role in the matter.

“That is true,” the SMU PR person told me, “but I can’t tell you who it is.”

I wondered what the big secret was, but since this little piece of information was not all that important in my research, I moved on to do other things. I found it interesting that a fifty-year-old memory still left one individual feeling quite emotional and another person not



willing to be open about it.

I then wrote a letter to Mayor Rawlings explaining what my project was and requested an interview. I didn't expect a direct response from him, but I thought the letter would be passed on to an aide who would provide an answer. Getting no response, several weeks later I called his chief-of-staff, Paula Blackmon.

On taking my call, Ms. Blackmon seemed stressed by what could have been a hectic day. Gaining her bearings, she politely asked what she could do for me. I made my request and she became a little more stressed. The word "stigma" popped out of her. She didn't seem happy that a writer was approaching the subject of the assassination. Again.

A couple weeks later, Ms. Blackmon told me that anyone from the media had to contact a Dallas public relations firm to get any information about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration. She referred me to Laurie Peat and Associates.

Ms. Peat grilled me for about a half hour on my journalistic background. She wanted to know how many times I had been to Dallas. And just what did I know about the city? After the interrogation, she said she'd get back to me regarding an interview with the mayor. Meanwhile I sent information about myself and my project to her firm. The interview never happened.

None of this is unusual for any reporter or writer to encounter. Many subjects and newsmakers are careful in cultivating relationships with the media,—and with good reason. Many in the media are biased and allergic to the truth. Any writer who can't handle the scrutiny Ms. Peat gave me belongs in another profession.

Dallas leaders were acting edgy and micro-managing the release of information regarding the planning of a commemoration.

As time went on, the author sometimes asked for even basic information and received nothing in response. I was asked to send more detailed information about myself and my project. I was passed back and forth between Blackmon and Peat. I was finally told by Peat's office that I had to e-mail questions, not call. No answers were returned, and it became obvious that asking for information from official city sources was a waste of time.

There is an old-fashioned term that can be used to describe the treatment: Stonewall.

I met resistance and anxiety from several others I had contacted

about the impact of the assassination on Dallas. One person who had written extensively on Dallas history would only talk to me off the record to provide “background.” He feared an intense intellectual backlash and would say nothing for public consumption.

In the late 1980s psychologist James Pennebaker did extensive research on how Dallas residents viewed the effects the assassination. He looked at the psyche of the city. Some of his findings were detailed in the Fagin book. In his own book, *Opening Up—The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, Pennebaker strongly asserted that communities, including Dallas, had to openly talk about traumas if they were to cope with after-effects.

Pennebaker himself was not open with me and would not even respond to my requests for interviews.

But the most interesting of the nervous reactions came when I contacted the Dallas Cowboys. My desire was to talk about how the team helped the community cope with the shock of the assassination. Several Dallasites had told me the team gave them something positive to think about as a diversion from the assassination.

The young woman in the team’s public relations office wasn’t just polite, she acted very receptive as I explained that I wanted to show how the team had helped the city. She told me she would give my contact information to team publicist Rich Dalrymple.

When Dalrymple called, he too, was receptive and provided me with the number of Gil Brandt, who had worked as vice president of player personnel from the team’s beginning in 1960 until 1989. Dalrymple happily suggested that I use his name in introducing myself to Brandt.

As I dialed Brandt’s number, I realized he had to be on in age if he had begun work for the Cowboys over fifty years earlier. Yet when he answered, his voice was clear and alert. He too, was cordial. But he was unwilling to talk about the team as it was connected to the Kennedy assassination and or how it could have helped Dallas cope with the tragic hangover.

Brandt was clearly nervous in tone once he found out why I had called. If I had wanted to talk about any of the Super Bowls the Cowboys played in or two championship confrontations with the Green Bay Packers during the sixties, I was sure he would have given me his time. He even said he would normally do anything for Dalrymple.

But talking about the assassination, even if the discussion was really

about how the team helped the public cope with that event, was clearly off limits. According to his reasoning, if he talked to me that would mean he would have to talk to other writers and media people. No, he couldn't do that, no matter how I tried to convince him that the team would be put in a positive light.

He left me the option to call him back, but Gil Brandt said he was going to check with the league office before making any commitments—and even then the answer was still probably no.

Obviously, there are times when the country goes overboard with its sports obsession. However, sports franchises are looked upon as civic entities, and they did various things in attempting to help the country cope with the 9/11 and Boston tragedies. But Gil Brandt did not want to talk about an organization in this light.

And his need to talk to the league office? Was the NFL nervous about the touchy subject of the assassination as it pertained to the Cowboys?

I next contacted the NFL office in New York. Talking with league spokesman Brenden Lee, I asked if there was any reason the NFL would be concerned about anyone connected to the Dallas Cowboys talking about their team as it pertained to the assassination. He said not that he knew of, and it seemed as if the question threw him a little. Lee wasn't on the defensive; it merely appeared that he or anyone connected with the league had not thought about this issue.

Lee then suggested that I send him an e-mail detailing what I needed as far as the Cowboys went. Additionally, in that e-mail, I asked the following question: "How does the NFL look at its role as a sports entity to help communities cope with national traumas such as 9/11 and the Boston bombing?" I hoped an answer to this question could help draw parallels to the Kennedy assassination.

Lee answered promptly, but all he said was that the NFL office could be of no help. He suggested that I contact the Cowboys again, specifically Rich Dalrymple. I did that on two occasions, leaving two messages. Another try to Brandt went unanswered.

For a time, I thought a handful of calls were not enough. Maybe I should have been more persistent and kept calling until I actually spoke with Dalrymple or Brandt and definitely got a "no" response. However, I became convinced that was useless. An interview should be done willingly or there wouldn't be a decent give-and-take of information. Even if Gil Brandt was wrong about worrying overreactions from the

NFL, he was clearly ill-at-ease talking about the team as it pertained to 1963 and an interview would probably produce nothing of value.

The accommodating Dalrymple eventually called back with another possible person for me to interview. He was acting professionally as he had in my first encounter, but I could sense embarrassment in his tone. No doubt he hadn't anticipated Brandt's refusal to talk. (All of this was odd since Brandt did grant interviews to other media people in November 2013.)

Dalrymple gave me the name of Sam Blair. He said that Blair had been a beat writer covering the Cowboys at the time of the assassination. Dalrymple provided an e-mail and a phone number. I would e-mail Blair before calling. Considering Brandt's cool reaction, I thought this was another time when a cold call would only scare—or at least throw Blair off balance.

In my original e-mail I told Blair that I would provide more information about my project if needed. Blair responded quickly and asked that I do exactly that. His e-mail was a little on the icy side. He didn't address me by name or use a closing like "Sincerely," or even "Yours truly." Blair's request for information was the only sentence in the correspondence, and it was a brief one at that. His name was nowhere in the message. (I write this even though I realize that e-mails are not as formal as old-fashioned mailed letters.)

I answered with a note that further explained my purpose and my intention to be honest in quoting Blair. Blair still wouldn't agree to talk with me although he did refer me to Gary Cartwright who had covered the Cowboys for the *Dallas Morning News* at the time of the assassination.

Cartwright, who also had to be around eighty, warned me that his memory was not all that hot. That turned out not to be true as he recalled many things in great detail and insight. Although he was well aware of the hostility aimed at Dallas and its citizens, he felt no personal guilt about the assassination—and didn't think that the city should either. He was perplexed when he was told about any civic sensitivity about the 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration.

Also open with memories were former Dallas residents Philip Chalk and John Eisenberg.

Chalk, who now works for the conservative publication, the *Weekly Standard*, and Eisenberg, a sports journalist who has written a book on

the Cowboys, agreed with Cartwright that the city had nothing to feel guilty about. They were surprised when told of the issues surrounding the 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration. Otherwise they didn't feel the assassination was a touchy subject as Mayor Rawlings, Gil Brandt, and Sam Blair apparently did.



Mayor Rawlings stated at the time the planning committee was formed that the purpose of the commemoration was “to send the simple message to all that are outside the city, throughout the world, that the citizens of Dallas honor the life and legacy of JFK.” Rawlings took a veiled shot at assassination researchers by adding, “We want to ensure there is zero commercialization of this event.” Assassination researchers, mostly those who maintain that there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, are often accused of doing their work for private gain without regard to the truth.

“Sounds like a secret society,” author Jim Marrs said in describing the planning of the commemoration.

John Judge concurred with Marrs. Judge was the director of the Coalition on Political Assassinations. COPA is a group of professionals that does private research into the major assassinations of the sixties, including the killings of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy. Judge believed that the city of Dallas wanted to keep conspiracy researchers out of Dealey Plaza for any 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremonies in order to control the debate about who killed Kennedy.

“This is content-based denial of freedom of speech,” said Judge, who maintained that his group was being denied the opportunity of its annual practice of conducting a moment of silence in Dealey Plaza on November 22 and that the city was doing what it could to suppress talk about conspiracy. Judge also said he didn't understand why Dallas needed to believe that Oswald acted alone, as a way to ease local guilt.<sup>15</sup>

“A conspiracy would be better,” Judge told the author in the summer of 2012. “Dallas was hostile, but some parts did love Kennedy. I don't believe Dallas killed him. Police were corrupt and didn't provide proper security. But there were plots in other cities like Chicago and Miami and other places.”<sup>16</sup>



Fifty years of gridlock. That was the original title for this book and was inspired by the inability of the Washington, DC political establishment to come up with a viable consensus on important issues. In the past half century, Dallas has experienced its own gridlock. The city has struggled to regain and even forge a new identity as the speculation and fascination with the assassination faded somewhat but never ended.

There is no doubt that the environment in Dallas was hostile to John Kennedy. Although many African Americans at the time thought Kennedy was moving slowly in the area of civil rights, small cracks began to appear at the foundation of segregation. People were not going to sit at the back of the bus much longer. Although the Cold War was far from over, many began to feel that a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union was not the answer to fighting global Communism or maintaining national security. The country was inching forward in another direction and there were at least parts of Dallas that weren't on board for the ride. Then someone shot and killed the president, and Dallas was left further behind.

"Kennedy will get his reward in hell." That was one hateful chant at the demonstration against Adlai Stevenson. One doesn't know what afterlife Kennedy experienced, but he was dead a month later.

"Stevenson is going to die. His heart will stop, stop, stop, and he will burn, burn, burn." Well, everyone dies eventually, and again we really don't know what happens in the after-life. But less than two years later Stevenson's heart did stop when he died in London of a heart attack.

Awful words. Hateful words. And words that would haunt Dallas for years come.