

JFK Assassination Analysis

Direction: You will be examining documents related to the JFK assassination below. For each document, there will be questions that you have to answer and fill out a graphic organizer. Once this is completed, you will be given a writing prompt related to the essential question.

Essential Question: Was John F. Kennedy assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald alone, or was there a conspiracy to kill the president?

Document A: Source: House Select Committee on Assassinations, 1978.

Scientific acoustical evidence establishes a high probability that two gunmen fired at President John F. Kennedy. Other scientific evidence does not preclude the possibility of two gunmen firing at the President.

The committee believes, on the basis of the evidence available to it, that President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy. The committee is unable to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy.

A thorough and reliable investigation into the responsibility of Lee Harvey Oswald for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was conducted. The investigation into the possibility of conspiracy in the assassination was inadequate. The conclusions of the investigations were arrived at in good faith, but presented in a fashion that was too definitive.

1. What type of evidence strongly indicated that two gunmen fired at John F. Kennedy?

Document B: Source: Gerald Posner, investigative journalist and author of *Case Closed* (1993), a book that concludes that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in assassinating President John F. Kennedy; TV interview, 1993.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations used sound experts to listen to a Dallas police Dictabelt. They concluded with a 95 percent certainty that there was a fourth shot fired at Dealey Plaza, and it came from the grassy knoll.

The National Academy of Sciences reviewed their work and found a multitude of errors and omissions. The most serious of which was that at the time that the Select Committee experts thought the shots were fired, [it] actually [was] one minute after the assassination had actually taken place.

Dealey Plaza is a veritable echo chamber, and it makes it very difficult sometimes to analyze the acoustic testimony. However, by looking at the statements of a witness who gave an opinion as to the source of the shots, we can see certain trends.

Eighty-eight percent of the 179 witnesses who expressed an opinion said there were three shots and three shots only. The largest group that identified a location, 28 percent, said they came from the book depository. Only four witnesses, 2 percent of all the witnesses at Dealey, heard shots coming from more than one location.

2. What percentage of witnesses heard shots coming from more than one location?

Document C: Source: Mike Feinsilber, reporter for The Associated Press, story filed July 2, 1997.

Thirty-three years ago, Gerald R. Ford took pen in hand and changed - ever so slightly - the Warren Commission's key sentence on the place where a bullet entered John F. Kennedy's body when he was killed in Dallas.

The effect of Ford's change was to strengthen the commission's conclusion that a single bullet passed through Kennedy and severely wounded Texas Gov. John Connally - a crucial element in its finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole gunman.

A small change, said Ford on Wednesday when it came to light, one intended to clarify meaning, not alter history.

"My changes had nothing to do with a conspiracy theory," he said in a telephone interview from Beaver Creek, Colo. "My changes were only an attempt to be more precise."

The Warren Commission concluded in 1964 that a single bullet - fired by a "discontented" Oswald - passed through Kennedy's body and wounded his fellow motorcade passenger, Connally, and that a second, fatal bullet, fired from the same place, tore through Kennedy's head.

The assassination of the president occurred Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas; Oswald was arrested that day but was shot and killed two days later as he was being transferred from the city jail to the county jail.

Conspiracy theorists reject the idea that a single bullet could have hit both Kennedy and Connally and done such damage. Thus they argue that a second gunman must have been involved.

Ford's changes tend to support the single-bullet theory by making a specific point that the bullet entered Kennedy's body "at the back of his neck" rather than in his uppermost back, as the commission staff originally wrote.

3. What does Gerald Ford say his reason was for changing a sentence in the Warren Commission Report?

Document D: Below is a picture of Kennedy's shirt that he was wearing when he was assassinated.



4. Where does the bullet hole appear to be on Kennedy's shirt and how does this line up with the change Ford made to the report (Document C)?

Document E: "Posner: Oswald Acted Alone" from ABC News interview.

Before Oswald was arrested for shooting President Kennedy, witnesses identified Oswald as a person who shot and killed Officer J.D. Tippit after he was stopped. Below is part of an interview with researcher and author of a book on the assassination of Kennedy.

Posner: I believe that the shooting of Officer Tippit shortly after the assassination of the president is the key to understanding that Lee Harvey Oswald was without question involved in the assassination. Oswald is a person of great political interest. He is involved in politics. He talks about Marxism. He defected to the Soviet Union. And he gets the word that the president has been shot, and according to what he tells the police, he says, "Gee, that must mean we're getting off work early. I can go home for the day." The last person in Dallas who would have gone home for the day after learning that the president had been shot outside the place that he worked would have been Oswald. He would have been hanging around and asking questions and finding out if the president was alive or dead and what had taken place.

Instead, he gets on a bus that's a little slow. He's very tightfisted, doesn't spend money very easy. [He] takes a taxi. That's remarkable. Goes back to the place that he's staying at. What does he do? What anybody does after the president's been shot — he grabs a pistol.

Then he walks down the road and in the middle of that is stopped by a policeman who has a general description of the shooter. Now Oswald, the patsy, doesn't know anything. Nothing's wrong, but he decides he better shoot this policeman just for the [heck] of it. So he shoots J. D. Tippit dead on the spot and then keeps going. The killing of Tippit is the evidence for those who refuse to acknowledge it, that this man is up to his eyeballs in the assassination of the president. There is no question of Oswald's guilt in this case when you look at his murder of Tippit so shortly after the murder of Kennedy.

5. How does Posner believe Oswald would have behaved when stopped by a police officer if he was framed?

Document F: Smithsonian Magazine article by Colin Shultz

Below is a narrative based on the account of Marina Oswald, Lee Harvey Oswald's widow of an attempted assassination of Major General Edwin Walker that Lee Harvey Oswald had carried out months before killing President Kennedy.

Oswald lifts his rifle and stares into the window. Surrounding Walker are folders, books, and stacks of packages wrapped in brown shipping paper. The walls are decorated with panels of foil wallpaper embossed with an Asian-style flower motif. Walker's head is in profile. He has a pencil in hand, and he is perfectly still, focused on something at his desk. From outside looking in, it must look a bit like a painting—as if Walker is caught in thought with the right side of his face clearly visible.

Oswald squints into his telescopic sight, and Walker's head fills the view. He looks so close now, and he's sitting so still, that there's no possible way to miss. Drawing a tight bead on Walker's head, he pulls the trigger. An explosion hurtles through the night, a thunder that echoes to the alley, to the creek, to the church and the surrounding houses.

Walker flinches instinctively at the loud blast and the sound of a wicked crack over his scalp—right inside his hair. For a second, he is frozen. His right arm is still resting on the desk alongside his 1962 income tax forms. He doesn't know it, but blood is beginning to appear.

6. What part of the body is Oswald attempting to shoot?

Document G:

Source: Jim DeEugenio, author of *The Sins of Robert Blakey*, a book about the House Select Committee's second chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey, published 1998.

Soon after he accepted the position, counsel Richard A. Sprague was introduced to photoanalyst-computer technician Richard E. Sprague. Sprague quickly arranged a presentation of the voluminous photos that Richard E. Sprague had collected over the years, undoubtedly the largest collection of pictures on the JFK case in any private collection. Sprague directed every hired detective and researcher to attend a photographic slide show put together by the Kennedy researcher. According to people who were there, it was a long and impressive presentation. But before the lights went down, Sprague turned to everyone in attendance and said, "I don't want anyone to leave unless I leave. And I don't plan on leaving." By the end of Sprague's four-hour slide show, Al Lewis told me that, of the 13 staff lawyers in attendance, only one still held out for the single bullet theory.

7. What did Sprague show in the passage above?

Document H: Louis Stokes, chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, questioning of reputed mob boss Santos Trifficante, 1978

In 1967, 1971, 1976, and 1977, those four years, columnist Jack Anderson wrote about the CIA-Mafia plots and the possibility that Castro decided to kill President Kennedy in retaliation. Mr. Anderson even contends in those articles that the same persons involved in the CIA-Mafia attempts on Castro's life were recruited by Castro to kill President Kennedy. The September 7, 1976 issue of *The Washington Post* contains one of Mr. Anderson's articles entitled, "Behind John F. Kennedy's Murder," which fully explains Mr. Anderson's position. I ask, Mr. Chairman, that at this point this article be marked as JFK exhibit F-409 and that it be entered into the record at this point.

Mr. Trafficante, I want to read to you just two portions of the article I have just referred to, after which I will ask for your comment. According to Mr. Anderson and Mr. Whitten in this article, it says: Before he died, Roselli hinted to associates that he knew who had arranged President Kennedy's murder. It was the same conspirators, he suggested, whom he had recruited earlier to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro. By Roselli's cryptic account, Castro learned the identity of the underworld contacts in Havana who had been trying to knock him off. He believed, not altogether without basis, that President Kennedy was behind the plot. Then over in another section, it says: According to Roselli, Castro enlisted the same underworld elements whom he had caught plotting against him. They supposedly were Cubans from the old Trafficante organization. Working with Cuban intelligence, they allegedly lined up an ex-Marine sharpshooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been active in the pro-Castro movement. According to Roselli's version, Oswald may have shot Kennedy or may have acted as a decoy while others ambushed him from closer range. When Oswald was picked up, Roselli suggested the underworld conspirators feared he would crack and disclose information that might lead to them. This almost certainly would have brought a massive U.S. crackdown on the Mafia. So Jack Ruby was ordered to eliminate Oswald making it appear as an act of reprisal against the President's killer. At least this is how Roselli explained the tragedy in Dallas.

8. How was the Mafia connected to JFK?

Evidence:

Oswald Acted Alone

Document _____

Document _____

Document _____

Conspiracy

Document _____

Document _____

Document _____

Essential Question: Was John F. Kennedy assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald alone, or was there a conspiracy to kill the president? Use evidence to support your claim. (5-7 Sentences)