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**The Shadow of Conspiracy: The CIA's role in the  
Assassination of John F. Kennedy through Mark  
Lane's *Plausible Denial***

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout American history, assassinations of and several attempts towards presidents have taken place since 1865. The frequency of these acts reflects the social, political and personal tensions at different historical periods. This B.A. thesis studies the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy through Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial* (1991). This study employs the theoretical framework of conspiracy theories based on Michael Barkun's three fundamental principles: "nothing is what it seems", "everything is connected" and "nothing happens by accident", which are essential for examining testimonies by Marita Lorenz, Lee Harvey Oswald and Edward Hunt. Through this framework, the thesis also critiques the official versions of the Warren Commission, highlighting inconsistencies, manipulations, and the possible existence of an institutional cover up.

Keywords: CIA, conspiracy theories, Warren Commission, *Plausible Denial*.

## RESUMEN

A lo largo de la historia de Estados Unidos ha habido varios asesinatos y varios intentos contra la vida de los presidentes desde 1865. La frecuencia de estos actos reflejan las tensiones sociales, políticas y personales en diferentes períodos históricos. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado estudia el papel de la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA) en el asesinato del presidente John Fitzgerald Kennedy a través del libro *Plausible Denial* (1991) de Mark Lane. Este estudio emplea como marco teórico la idea de teorías conspirativas basándose en los tres principios fundamentales de Michael Barkun: "nada es lo que parece", "todo está conectado" y "nada ocurre por accidente", los cuales son esenciales para examinar los testimonios de Marita Lorenz, Lee Harvey Oswald y Edward Hunt. A través de este marco, este estudio también critica las versiones oficiales de la Comisión Warren, destacando inconsistencias, manipulaciones y la posible existencia de un encubrimiento institucional.

Palabras clave: CIA, teorías de conspiración, Comisión Warren, *Plausible Denial*.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, conspiracy theories have become very popular in society, getting more visibility in the public sphere through both traditional broadcasting and social media (Hannah & Conner, 2024, p. 1). People often feel uncertain, paranoid, and begin to speculate when they are trying to understand events that don't have clear answers. One of the areas in which these theories emerge is in relation to violence against public and political figures. In the United States, political attacks towards presidents are a frequent issue. Since the end of the Civil War in 1865, there have been several assassination attempts, but the most famous one was when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot in 1963. He was the fourth US president to be assassinated, after Abraham Lincoln in 1865, James Abram Garfield in 1881 and William McKinley in 1901 (Superville & Cassidy, 2024). Kennedy's assassination really shook the country and marked a turning point for conspiracy theories that people still talk about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963, remains one of the most debated and widely discussed events in modern American history. Many conspiracy theories about the assassination have emerged throughout the years. Some argue that several groups within the US government, especially the CIA, were responsible. Authors such as Mark Lane, in his book *Plausible Denial* (1991), have claimed that tensions between the CIA and Kennedy, particularly after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, could have been a key factor leading to his assassination. One of the most remarkable testimonies discussed by Lane is that of Marita Lorenz, a former undercover agent who had connections with both Fidel Castro and CIA agents. Her testimony in court and in subsequent studies reveals disturbing links between the CIA, figures such as E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis, and a possible covert operation that led to the Kennedy assassination. Looking at her testimony, the Hunt trial and Oswald's role makes it easier to understand how many doubts there are about the involvement of government departments in a major conspiracy. This study also looks at the history and politics of the United States during the Cold War, when the CIA was widely involved in covert operations. What is relevant about *Plausible Denial* for the present work is that it allows us to explore how conspiracy theories are used as a way to make sense of historical events. Therefore, the purpose of this analysis is to look at the arguments backing the CIA's involvement in the assassination considering the evidence Mark Lane provides through the lenses of how conspiracy theories and conspiracy thinking are constructed. Following this introduction, which presents the purpose of this work, its methodology, and the structure to be followed, this study has two main sections. The first section explores the historical and theoretical background of conspiracy

theories. It focuses on both the political context of the time, the Kennedy assassination, and ends with a critique of the Warren Report and the government cover-up, highlighting the lack of transparency, the resistance to document declassification and the broader impact on public trust as presented by Lane. To this end, the concepts according to Thomas Presskorn and Ole Bjerg, *Conspiracy Theory: Truth Claim or Language Game* (2017), and Dentith (2019), the division of conspiracy theories and the three fundamental principles by Michael Barkun that Daniel Pipes explains in *Conspiracy* (1999), the distinction between conspiracy theory and conspiracionism by Brian Keeley (1999) Adrian Vermeule and Cass Sunstein (2009), and the notion of “paranoid style in American politics” described by Richard Hofstadter in his very influential work of the same name (1964) are used.

The second section is about analyzing the discussion offered by Mark Lane in *Plausible Denial* (1991). Throughout this section, the study goes into its most analytical part that follows a qualitative and interpretative approach examining the evidence provided and looking at the arguments dealing with CIA’s involvement in the Kennedy assassination, through the key testimonies and documents provided, such as the trial of E. Howard Hunt and the statements of Marita Lorenz. Another important aspect that this chapter discusses is how the presentation of Lee Harvey Oswald as a “lone wolf” is often seen as an inconsistency from the official narrative. The negative framing of his activities in Mexico, New Orleans, and the USSR are presented in *Plausible Denial* as politically motivated, and supported by evidence that Oswald had been manipulated by the CIA (Lane, 1991). To do so, I apply a theoretical framework based on the three main principles commonly found in conspiracy theories: “nothing is what it seems”, “nothing happens by accident”, and “everything is connected”. This analysis uses these ideas to show how the book questions the official narrative and present alternative explanations. It focuses on three main parts of Lane’s narrative: the testimony of Marita Lorenz, the trial of E. Howard Hunt and the portrayal of Lee Harvey Oswald. By looking these elements from the perspective of the three conspiracy principles mentioned above, the analysis uncovers patterns that support a conspiratorial view of the events.

Finally, the conclusion explores on the social and cultural impact of Kennedy’s assassination on American society. Beyond its political impact, the event deeply affected the public’s mindset, leading to a loss of trust in authorities and growing scepticism in society. The media’s role in covering the event marks a turning point in how Americans receive and interpret news, and the ongoing mystery surrounding Kennedy’s death continues to fuel a strong culture of suspicion that persists today.



# Chapter I: The Kennedy Assassination: Conspiracy, Politics, and the Warren Report debate

## Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories have generated discussions not only in academic fields but also among the general public over the past few decades, thanks to their significant influence on today's political and cultural discourse. Although sometimes they are seen as marginal and exaggerated ideas, their continuing relevance and popularity show that they call a closer and more thoughtful analysis.

From the outside, a conspiracy theory can be thought of as a mostly innocuous 'whodunnit', invoking "questions that are found in crime fiction and spy novels" that incite audiences to explore alternative possibilities to the official version of events (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 2). For many conspiracy theorists, this isn't just a game, it becomes a serious ideological position: they believe they are challenging powerful institutions and defending the truth against systems they see as manipulative. From their perspective, they are not spreading disinformation, but questioning official versions that they think conceal hidden interests. Often, they tend to reject criticism, interpreting it as an attempt to silence them or simply mocking those who ask questions. In this context, conspiracy theorists see themselves as brave truth-tellers. But this leads to a key question: what power or establishment are they really challenging? In many cases, these theories act as modern forms of propaganda that have come to dominate much of today's political discourse.

The case of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination is a clear example of how this dynamic manifests: it has generated alternative interpretations and institutional suspicions that persist to the present day. In this sense, it is important to note that the term conspiracy theory is not a trivial expression: "[t]he concept theory always already implies a demarcation between legitimate, rational knowledge and illegitimate, irrational non-sense" (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 3).

Conspiracy theories "flourish in gossip, at special conventions, and on blogs, web forums and other outlets on the internet" (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 4). From an academic perspective, there are three main approaches to their study. The first approach "is constituted by studies that analyze conspiracy theories as expressions of some kind of psychological, social or even political pathology" (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 4). The classic reference for this approach is Richard Hofstadter's essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, where he

describes this style as characterised by “evokes the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy” (1964, p. 3). The second approach “is constituted by studies that approach conspiracy theories as expressions of contemporary culture on par with art or literature” (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 5). In the third approach “we find philosophical studies that analyse the epistemology of conspiracy theories” (Bjerg & Thygesen, 2017, p. 5). Authors such as David Coady in his book *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate* (2006) have argued that while many of these theories may seem irrational, they should not be dismissed simply because they are labelled conspiracy theories. Coady argues that each theory should be critically evaluated on its own merits. Dentith, among others, has created a theoretical framework that offers an evidence-based examination and refutes the general scepticism regarding conspiracy theories. According to Dentith a conspiracy theory is “a theory about a conspiracy; to wit, a theory about two or more people working together in secret towards some end” (2019, p. 2244). Despite public opinion linking these theories to irrationality, Dentith argues that they should be analysed on a case-by-case basis (2019, p. 2244).

It is important to distinguish between what is meant by conspiracy theory and conspiracism. According to Brian Keeley, “[a] conspiracy theory is a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons – the conspirators – acting in secret” (1999, p. 116). This group acts in secret, concealing its intentions and responsibility for events. Similarly, Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule define conspiracy theories as:

[A] conspiracy theory can generally be counted as such if it is an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role (at least until their aims are accomplished). (2009, p. 205)

Conspiracy theories can be divided into two broad types: petty conspiracy theories and world conspiracy theories. The first fear “concerns conspiracies with limited aims” the second “those with unlimited aims” (Pipes, 1999, p. 21). World conspiracy theories tend to have three basic elements in common: “a powerful, evil, and clandestine group that aspires to global hegemony” (Pipes, 1999, p. 22).

However, conspiracism is not a theory in itself, but a way of thinking. As political scientist Michael Barkun argues, conspiracy theories are based on three basic principles: “nothing happens by accident,” “nothing is what it seems,” and “everything is connected” (Barkun, 2013, p. 3-4). Richard Hofstadter (1964), warned that this kind of thinking was not



unique to his era, which was marked by fear of an alleged communist world government. This style is not based on empirical evidence, but on an emotional state in which everything is interpreted as part of a hidden threat. It is characterised by a focus on exaggeration, extreme suspicion and belief in organised conspiracies against a group or nation. Followers of this type of thinking often see history as the result of covert strategies developed by powerful enemies seeking to destroy their values and way of life.

Conspiracy theories cannot be reduced to alternative narratives or marginal explanations. On the contrary, they must be understood as discursive constructions that involve cognitive, the political and cultural aspects. These theories offer the conspiracist a structure of meaning in which everything is connected, nothing is what it seems, and nothing happens by accident. One of the pillars of this mentality is the belief that nothing happens by accident. According to this logic, there is no room for human error or chance. As Pat Robertson points out in *The New World Order*, “[t]he events of public policy are not the accidents and coincidences we are led to believe. They are planned” (1991, p. 9) This principle is powerfully illustrated throughout his book, where Robertson presents two interconnected conspiracies: a financial one, “some point to the greed of international banks, multinational corporations, and the vested aristocracy of the old new world” (1991, p. 9) in which they manipulate historical events like Lincoln’s assassination “there is no hard evidence to prove it, but it is my belief that John Wilkes Booth, the man who assassinated Lincoln was in the employ of the European bankers” (1991, p. 265); and a moral spiritual one, led by groups such as the Illuminati and Freemasons, aiming to dismantle Christian values and impose a totalitarian global regime (1991, p. 9). This view not only reinforces the belief that everything has a hidden agenda, but also shows how conspiracy discourse works as a tool for interpreting history through suspicion and ideological resistance.

In his book *Pawns in the Game* (1958), William Guy Carr argues that elite organizations such as Illuminati, Freemasons and international bankers are deliberately manipulating world events to establish a totalitarian regime. Carr suggests that historical events that appeared chaotic, like the failed Dardanelles campaign during World War I, were not simply military errors. Rather, he claims that figures such as Winston Churchill intentionally sacrificed lives because of intentional decisions or under the influence of hidden forces. “The Dardanelles venture could have succeeded, and would probably have ended the war in 1916, if Churchill had waited until both army and naval forces were ready to co-operate jointly (1958, p. 86). Central to Carr’s argument is the idea that powerful elites manipulate world affairs in secret. He writes:

The more we study the methods employed by the Secret Powers behind international affairs, the more obvious it is to see that they make private assassinations look like accidents or suicides; sabotage look like carelessness, errors of judgement, and unintentional blunders committed due to excusable circumstances. (1958, p. 86).

A key aspect of conspiracy theories is the thought that certain figures have been intentionally changed or created to cover up the truth. This phenomenon, known as disinformation, has historically been employed by governments and intelligence agencies, such as in the USSR, which strengthens the legitimacy of this concern (Dentith, 2019, p. 2249). In addition, Dentith highlights the difficulty of secret evidence, that is, data whose authenticity cannot be confirmed because it is restricted to certain institutions. These can be categorised reports and protected statements. While some secrecy can be justified on national security grounds, Dentith warns that this opacity can also be used to conceal illegal activities (2019, p. 2258). This way of thinking does not simplify reality, but it also places the believer in a privileged position: that of someone who has access to a truth that is hidden from the rest.

William Carr, in *Pawns in the Game* (1958), uses the metaphor of “pawns” to illustrate how hidden elites manipulate ordinary people and political leaders like pieces on a chessboard, sacrificing them according to their interests. Mark Lane’s *Plausible Denial* furthers this by arguing that not only powerful institutions conceal truth, but they actively organize partial disclosures to distract the public. He describes the intelligence tactic of a “limited hangout” (1991, p. 129), where agencies like the CIA admit controlled truths while shielding the more dangerous realities. In his words, such revelations are “calculated to both fascinate and confuse the public” (1991, p. 129) allowing officials to appear transparent while avoiding accountability. Lane states that even official investigations, such as the House Select Committee on Assassinations were manipulated in this way revealing just enough to satisfy curiosity. Individuals like Edward Hunt were sacrificed like pawns to protect the institution. In this sense, the verb “to hang” functions metaphorically like Carr’s “pawns” and modern “sheeple”, referring to manipulated individuals used strategically and then rejected. A clear example can be found in the following sentence about Edward Hunt: “[h]is luck has run out, and the CIA has decided to sacrifice him to protect its clandestine services” (as cited in Lane, 1991, p. 130). Hunt is portrayed as a disposable figure, strategically used by the intelligence services to protect broader structures. Even, in the following sentence, “Hunt is vulnerable—an easy target as they say in the spy business. His reputation and integrity have been destroyed” (1991, p. 130), with his reputation damaged and with nothing to lose, he becomes the perfect scapegoat to cover up clandestine operations.

The second pillar of this thinking is the belief that nothing is what it seems. According to this logic, “[t]o be effective, a conspiracy must camouflage itself and its true purpose and pretend to be the opposite of what it really is” (Pipes, 1999, p. 45). Life is seen as a *mise-en-scène* in which what seems obvious, for example a gain, a loss, must be interpreted as the opposite (Pipes, 1999, p. 45). This role reversal corresponds to a dualistic logic in which the world is divided into forces of good and evil, clearly differentiated but hidden under multiple disguises. This logic leads to three errors: seeing enmities where there are alliances, discovering cooperation where there is competition, assuming freedom where there is control (Pipes, 1999, 45).

Finally, the third pillar is the belief that everything is connected. The idea that “the conspiracist world has no room for accident, pattern is believed to be everywhere, albeit hidden from plain view” (Barkun, 2013, p. 4). For the conspiracy theorist, if something happens, it must have been planned. For this reason, patterns are believed to exist everywhere, though they are hidden behind appearances.

Understanding these principles is essential to analysing how conspiracy theories construct an alternative account of historical events.

### **The political context**

John F. Kennedy’s arrival in the White House marked an era of great dynamism in US diplomacy. His presidency was marked by both great successes and failures during the Cold War, which provoked intense tensions with the Soviet Union. The most significant and embarrassing failure of his administration was the Bay of Pigs landing in 1961, a failed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro’s government in Cuba. This episode started a kind of war between Kennedy and the CIA.

The conflict between the United States and Cuba intensified in the context of the Cold War, a period marked by ideological, political and military confrontation between the Western side, led by the United States, and the Communist side, led by the Soviet Union. One of the most critical flashpoints of this rivalry in the West was the Cuban Revolution, which culminated in the fall of Fulgencio Batista’s regime in 1959 (United States Department of State, n.d.).

Batista had close economic and diplomatic ties with the United States. His government facilitated US investment, particularly in sectors such as sugar, tourism... (United States Department of State, n.d.). However, his regime was challenged by internal corruption and a lack of civil liberties. Nevertheless, Fidel Castro's rise to power generated suspicion in Washington. The US perception was that the new Cuban government was not only damaging US economic interests, but also promoting a political model that ran counter to liberal democracy.

In response to this threat, the US government began secretly planning ways to remove Castro from power. During the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had begun to develop a secret invasion plan based on the use of Cuban exiles opposed to the Castro regime (JFK Library, 2024a). The plan was devised by a team led by the CIA Director Allen Dulles, who selected a group of agents with previous experience in covert operations, including veterans of the 1954 coup in Guatemala. They were joined by a paramilitary force known as Brigade 2506, made up of Cuban exiles (JFK Library, 2024a). This plan, known as Operation Zapata, was approved by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy on 4 April 1961. The operation consisted of landing on the beaches of the Bay of Pigs with the aim of starting a popular revolt that would lead to the collapse of the regime. But the operation was a failure. Lack of air support and the rapid response of the Cuban army meant that the invasion ended in defeat in less than three days (United States Department of State, n.d.)

After the mission failed, Castro's forces captured and killed many of the fleeing brigadists. In total, more than 11,000 men were taken prisoner. The episode was not only a symbolic victory for the Cuban regime, but also a diplomatic defeat for the Kennedy administration. The aftermath of the operation led to a humanitarian agreement that culminated on 22 December 1962, when the prisoners were exchanged for \$53 million in food and medicine (JFK Library, 2024a). After their repatriation, an official ceremony was organised where the liberated brigadists presented the President with the flag of Brigade 2506 as a sign of loyalty and respect (JFK Library, 2024a). This symbolic act was part of an initiative to restore the administration's public image, which had been damaged by the failure of the operation.

However, there were significant political repercussions. The Kennedy administration suffered a major decline of international prestige and credibility, especially among its allies. Internally, Kennedy was deeply disappointed with the CIA, which he accused of providing him with inaccurate information regarding the mission's probable success. This internal frustration

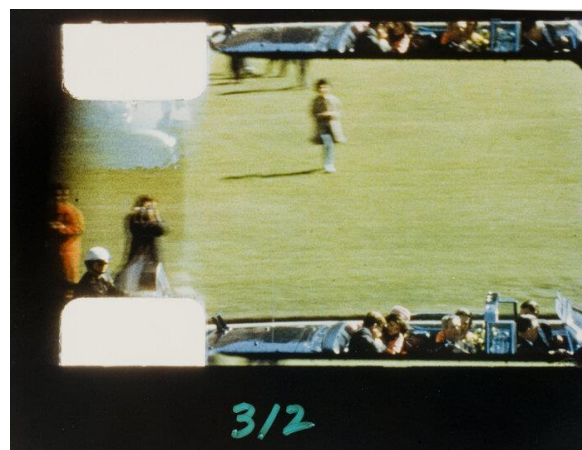
progressively evolved into an open rupture between the President and the agency. As Mark Lane demonstrates in *Plausible Denial* (1991), the Bay of Pig failure not only rejected the CIA in Kennedy's eyes, but also initiated an intense battle of power struggle. In the chapter titled *Why did the CIA murder the President?* (p. 91-114), Lane recounts how this political fallout intensified Kennedy's distrust to the point that he declared his intention to dismantle and destroy the agency, which was scheduled for 1964, following Kennedy's re-election, and his intention was to completely rebuild the agency (1991, p. 98). The New York Times reported on 25 April 1966, under the subheading "Kennedy's Bitterness", that "as the enormity of the Bay of Pigs disaster come home to him, said to one of the highest officials in his Administration that he wanted to "splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds" (1991, p. 93). This statement reflected more than personal frustration, it symbolized a growing institutional crisis in which the President questioned the agency's autonomy and its expanding influence within the government, and is the key to understanding the complex network of interests and conflicts that in the end led to his assassination.

### **Kennedy's assassination**

On 22 November 1963, one of the most significant events in the history of the United States took place: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. This bloody and devastating act took place in Dallas. Since the autumn of 1963, Kennedy and his political advisers had been preparing for his election campaign and his candidacy for the presidency in 1964, with the aim of ensuring his continuity in the White House. Before arriving in Dallas, Kennedy's campaign had passed through cities such as Boston and Philadelphia, where he held Democratic rallies and public events to win over voters. Florida and Texas were two key states for his re-election, so he intended to visit both states to secure Democratic support (JFK Library, 2024b).

The visit to Texas had two objectives: to gain support for the Democratic Party in a state that had been divided, and to diminish tensions within the party. Kennedy was warned that his stay in Texas could be dangerous because of the presence of a small group of extremists who were contributing to political tensions in Texas and who had previously attacked the US ambassador to the United Nations, and were expected to make themselves particularly felt in Dallas (JFK Library, 2024b). During his trip, the President was greeted with enthusiasm in cities such as San Antonio, Houston and Fort Worth. However, his arrival in Dallas was marked by a tense political atmosphere, with opposition groups demonstrating against him, and it was in this city that the tragedy occurred.

On the morning of 22 November 1963, Kennedy and his wife First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy were riding in a convertible limousine with Governor John Connally and his wife Nellie to their next stop, Trade Mart, after being given a rousing welcome at Love Field Airport. Crowds of people eagerly awaited their arrival and greeted the Kennedys. At around 12:30a.m., as the President arrived at Dealey Plaza and walked past the Texas School Book Depository, several shots rang out. The first one apparently missed and hit the ground, the second hit Kennedy in the upper back, passing through his throat and into Governor Connally's shoulder and finally the third and most lethal shot struck his head and he collapsed on his wife who was in shock. The limousine was driven to nearby Parkland Memorial Hospital, where Kennedy was rushed to the hospital. However, nothing could be done to save him. At 1:00p.m. President John. F. Kennedy was declared dead. After two hours, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and Jacqueline were sworn in as the 36th President of the United States aboard Air Force One (Wallenfeldt, 2025). A civilian who witnessed the assassination, Mr Abraham Zapruder, filmed the event in colour. This film is considered one of the most relevant and recognisable historical records, as it depicts the crucial moments of Kennedy's assassination during his parade in a convertible in Dealey Plaza. The historical importance of the Zapruder film lies in the fact that it provides an accurate and clear perspective of the moment when Kennedy was shot. The video has led many to question the official version of the assassination. Its release to the public became a key component in the debates surrounding Kennedy's death, and since then the film has been the subject of numerous studies and analyses, both from a legal and a conspiratorial point of view. However, it has been used as evidence "by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as a Presidential Commission established by Executive Order by President Lyndon B. Johnson and headed up by Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren" (Nalli, 2018, p. 2).



**Figure 1:** Photogram 312, 0.056 seconds before the shot that killed Kennedy.

The prime suspect in his murder was Lee Harvey Oswald, an employee of the Texas School Book Depository. However, on 24 November 1963, as Oswald was being transferred to the county jail, he was shot and killed by Jack Ruby before he could be tried.

### **Criticism of the Warren Report**

The Warren Commission, also known as the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, was established by President Lyndon B. Johnson on 29 November 1963 by Executive Order 11130 to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963 in Dallas, Texas, and the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, the man accused of shooting him (*Warren Commission - Introduction*, 2025). The Commission was led by Chief Justice Earl Warren and included several major political figures like Richard B. Russell, John Sherman Cooper, Hale Boggs, Gerald R. Ford, Allen W. Dulles and John J. McClover. Dulles and John J. McCloy. Most of them had experience in law, politics and national security (*Warren Commission - Introduction*, 2025).

The Commission had the authority to call in witnesses and ask for evidence, although it did not offer any of them immunity. It worked closely with federal and state agencies such as the FBI, the Secret Service and the Texas Attorney General's Office, and with a mixed team of lawyers, historians and other experts. Its final report was submitted on 24 September 1964, accompanied by 26 volumes of testimonies and documents, which were stored in the National Archives (*Warren Commission - Introduction*, 2025).

A clear example of internal pressure and manipulation within the Warren Commission comes from one of its own internal counsel, O'Neill. In an interview with Mark Lane during 1976-1977 and later in his memoir *Man of the House* (1988), O'Neill admitted that he and other counsel were aware that all gunshots came from the Texas School Book Depository, where Lee was positioned. "The Warren commission's conclusion that there was "no credible evidence" that even supported the rumor that shots had come from behind the fence on the knoll was absolutely accurate" (Lane, 1991, p. 27). However, O' Neill revealed a significant contradiction. He recalled a conversation with Kennedy assistant, Kenneth O'Donnell, who confessed that he had initially told the FBI that he heard two shots come from behind the fence. But, according to O'Donnell, the FBI told him that such version "couldn't have happened that way and that I must have been imagining things. So I testified the way they wanted me to" (1991, p. 27).

The CNN article criticises a series of mistakes and possible cover-ups involving both the FBI and the CIA. From the outset, it notes that the Warren Report was released according to a political timetable set by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who wanted the report well completed before the November 1964 elections (Sabato, 2013). This urgency compromised the investigation depth and credibility. The FBI's attitude was evasive rather than investigative, more focused on avoiding culpability rather than uncovering the truth about Lee Harvey Oswald. Even FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover later admitted: "We failed in carrying through some of the most salient aspects of the Oswald investigation. It ought to be a lesson to all" (Sabato, 2013, n.p.).

But even more questionable was the CIA's conduct. According to the article and to Mark Lane, the agency manipulated witnesses, hid others and withheld key information. The CIA never informed the Warren Commission that it had followed Oswald or explained its reasons for doing so. To this day, it maintains that "did not have a relation with Oswald and that it is not withholding anything important about the assassination from the public" (Sabato, 2013, n.p.). Public mistrust towards the CIA intensified when it was discovered that it had continued to lie during another official investigation into the Kennedy assassination in the 1970s, led by the House of Representatives. Robert Blakey, who directed that investigation, said that: "he doesn't believe anything the agency told him and his panel" (Sabato, 2013, n.p.).

The agency's relationship with the Mafia, another key suspect, was also covered up. They downplayed the links of Jack Ruby, Oswald's killer, to organised crime. Although the Commission concluded that "the evidence does not establish a significant link" (Sabato, 2013, n.p.), the reality is that Ruby had frequent contacts with the Mafia. Moreover, the Commission ignored the testimony of key eyewitnesses in Dealey Plaza who had "useful information to impart" and who still wonder why they were not interviewed. Some of this testimony contradicted the official conclusions, but was dismissed (Sabato, 2013, n.p.). This analysis questions whether the Warren Commission had a real intention of uncover the full truth, or whether its goal was simply trying to calm public opinion and maintain national stability during a tense Cold War climate marked by fears of communism.

The Warren Commission's lack of transparency and possible omissions not only frustrated the search for the truth, but also reinforced a culture of distrust of government toward institutions. While the report concluded that Oswald was the assassin, doubts remain about whether he acted alone or there was complicity and manipulation by other powerful forces. The possible release of classified documents under the Assassination Records Collection Act of



1992 could provide crucial answers. However, there is still the possibility that information could be withheld in the name of national security.

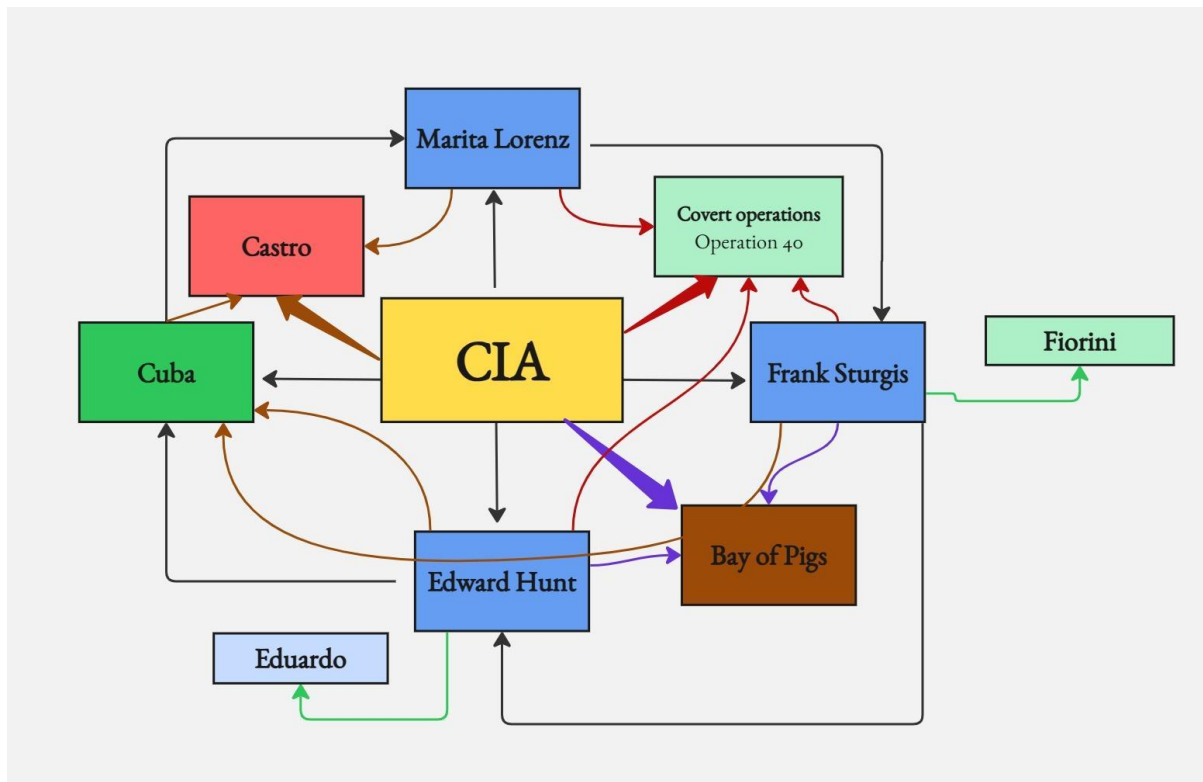
## **Chapter II: Testimonies and CIA's role through Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial***

In *Plausible Denial*, Mark Lane presents the results of his exhaustive investigation into the CIA's alleged involvement in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As a lawyer and writer, Lane supports his arguments using evidence collected over the years, including declassified documents, official testimonies and sworn statements, as well as his own direct involvement as defence counsel in the 1985 Miami trial, where he represented former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, who was accused of being involved in the conspiracy. What makes this book particularly convincing is that Lane does not speculate without basis: he was present at the hearings, interrogated key witnesses, and presented solid evidence to a jury. The book's title alludes to the principle of "plausible deniability", used by the CIA in the early 1960s to "describe the intentional withholding of testimony from government officials in order to protect them from knowledge of illegal or unethical activities on the part of the CIA" (Van Til, 2024). According to Lane, Kennedy's assassination was not an isolated event, but rather the culmination of ongoing tensions between the president and the CIA.

For this reason, I use *Plausible Denial* as the primary source for this work. It is supported by verifiable facts and supported by documents. It was developed by someone who investigated the case from the outside and was also directly involved in it. Lane offers a critical yet fact-based viewpoint, making him a valuable source for analysing the potential motives and those responsible behind President Kennedy's assassination.

### **Marita Lorenz**

To properly understand what Mark Lane discusses in his work, it is important to consider two contexts in which the characters have direct links with the CIA. The first of these is Cuba, a key setting during the Cold War where the paths of Marita Lorenz, E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis cross. All of them participated, in one way or another, in covert operations promoted by the CIA with the aim of destabilising or eliminating the Castro regime. The similarities between the three individuals are then analysed, as well as their respective roles in actions against Cuba. Finally, the reasons for this background are explored to evaluate their potential involvement in a broader conspiracy. A diagram similar to those used in conspiracy theories (based on Lane's information) is included here to make this more visual, facilitating the identification and understanding of the elements analysed below.



**Figure 2:** Diagram of the connections between the testimonies. Created in Miro.

First, let us look at the character of Marita Lorenz and her arrival at the CIA. Marita Lorenz's story begins in 1959, at the beginning of her relationship with Fidel Castro, the leader of the Cuban revolution (Lane, 1991, p. 288). Her affair with Castro made her a crucial figure in Cold War politics and a potential target for the CIA, which saw Cuba as a constant threat to US interests in the region. According to her testimony, the agency recruited her to infiltrate Castro's inner circle in order to carry out covert missions against the Cuban regime. Among those missions was a failed attempt to poison Castro, an effort that Lorenz says left her marked and discontent with the CIA. (Lane, 1991, p. 289). Her arrival at the CIA did not take place until Lorenz suffered a forced abortion when she was drugged (Lane, 1991, p. 289) and poisoned by Castro, with the CIA using this poisoning to turn her against Castro.

According to Marita Lorenz in the documentary *How Fidel Castro was nearly assassinated by a 19-Year--Old girl*, the CIA started a programme of "let's get even with him" and "they're going to convince her that the United States is the good guy and Fidel Castro is the bad guy" (22:17); once she was integrated into the group, they told her of their intention to neutralise Castro as "you can just put something in his food and put him to sleep" (28:12)

Eventually, Lorentz began to believe everything the CIA told her about Castro's attempts to invade the United States and that the US Constitution was at stake and she was the only that could stop him. But it was not until 1960, when he met Sturgis in Miami, that they decided the best way to assassinate Castro was with poison pills (34:14), Sturgis got the poison from the mafia, although the mafia did not have good relations with the US, they saw an opportunity to set up a base in Cuba (35:05). The pills contained botulism toxin and were dissolved whole in liquid. The process Marita followed to deliver the poison was to "go into the bathroom and I put it in the cold cream jar" and put it in her drink (39:33). The mission failed, however, because Castro knew she was coming to kill him.

As discussed in the section on *conspiracy theories*, the pathologist Michael Barkun claims that conspiracy thinking is founded on three fundamental principles: "Nothing happens by accident", "nothing is what it seems", and "everything is connected". Two of these principles can clearly be identified in Marita Lorenz's testimony. Firstly, the idea that "nothing happens by accident" is evident in the CIA's actions towards her. The agency had been monitoring her activities for some time and, upon discovering her intimate relationship with Fidel Castro, recognised it as a valuable opportunity to gain access to the Cuban leader's inner circle.

This suggests that Lorenz's recruitment by the CIA was no coincidence, but rather the outcome of a carefully planned operation. She was not recruited spontaneously, but as a result of well-orchestrated emotional manipulation. Proof of this is that the CIA assured her that Castro was responsible for her abortion, which was a traumatic event for her. While there is no conclusive evidence that Castro ordered to do it, the fact that the agency used this narrative suggests that even the most intimate and personal events can be exploited for political purposes. Thus, through this psychological manipulation, the CIA achieved its goal of turning Lorenz into an agent willing to collaborate in a mission to assassinate Castro.

The second principle, "nothing is what it seems", is evident in the phrase "Let's get even with him" (22:17), which implies a narrative of personal revenge when, in reality, it is a covert operation part of a far more complex geopolitical conflict. Similarly, the statement "they're going to convince her that the United States is the good guy and Fidel Castro is the bad guy" (22:17) reveals the CIA's use of a psychological strategy, involving a moral contrast to manipulate Lorenz's perceptions and justify their actions. This oversimplification of the conflict, portraying the US as the hero and Castro as the villain, does not reflect the situation's true complexity. Rather, it is part of a discourse designed to manipulate the agent's emotions

and legitimise the mission. Therefore, what initially appears to be an ideological choice or personal decision is actually the result of a carefully designed narrative intended to conceal the agency's true political intentions. This demonstrates how, within a conspiratorial framework, facts are not always as they seem: behind an apparently noble cause lies an agenda of manipulation and control.

This analysis leads us to a key question. If Castro really was the absolute villain that the CIA describes, why didn't he kill Marita Lorenz when he knew she was trying to kill him? According to Lorenz's testimony, not only did he let her live, he also told her: "[y]ou couldn't kill me. You would never do that, would you?" (Lane, 1991, p. 290), showing that he was aware of her intentions but chose not to act violently towards her. This decision challenges the demonised image that the CIA had created of him as a ruthless and implacable leader. Instead, it reveals a reaction that, while complex, does not correspond to the stereotype of a brutal dictator who would justify a covert assassination operation.

But consider a situation where a Cuban agent had been caught trying to assassinate a US leader on behalf of a foreign government. In this situation, it is unlikely that the CIA would have shown the same degree of compassion. It is more likely that the agent would have been eliminated or imprisoned immediately, and the situation would have been used to reinforce the official discourse on the communist threat. However, Lorenz, claims that her CIA affiliation persisted beyond the Castro assassination plot. Thereafter, she was recruited again by agents such as Frank Sturgis and E. Howard Hunt, who were important in operations against Cuba. "Did you work with a man named Frank Sturgis, while you were working for the CIA?" "Yes, I did" (Lane, 1919, p. 293). Sturgis, who adopted the name Francisco Fiorini, is reported to have served as the link between the Miami operations and the group planning the Kennedy assassination. "What other names, to your knowledge, is Frank Sturgis known by?" "Frank Fiorini, Hamilton; the last name, Hamilton. F-I-O-R-I-N-I" (Lane, 1991, p. 293).

Investigations into Lorenz's testimony intensified after the murder, especially as she revealed more information about the covert operations in which she had been involved and accused Sturgis of threatening her life. This complexity is further intensified when one considers the following direct statement by Marita Lorenz during her trial testimony: when questioned by Dunne about her involvement in CIA operations in Cuba, she answered: "I will tell you what is on record. I stole secrets from Cuba. I was trained to kill. Anything else?" (Lane, 1991, p. 290). If we analyse this sentence part by part we can identify that in "I stole secrets from Cuba. I was trained to kill". Lorenz explicitly confirms her active role as an agent

in intelligence operations, making it clear that she was not simply caught up in events, but was part of a carefully crafted CIA plan. Secondly, her use of the expression “What is on record” suggests that there are more details that have not been officially documented. The ironic tone of his question, “Anything else?” could also be interpreted as hidden criticism of the manipulation of his history. Ultimately, her testimony establishes a direct link between covert operations in Cuba and her subsequent involvement in larger cases, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Her connections with individuals such as Frank Sturgis and E. Howard Hunt, who had known links to the CIA, demonstrated that she was involved in a broader conspiracy. This demonstrates that “everything is connected” within a network of clandestine operations that transcends a single country or event. Thus, what initially seems to be a personal tale of a woman and a dictator evolves into a central element of a broader narrative involving espionage, manipulation, and international conspiracy. Not only does Marita Lorenz’s story as framed by Lane illustrate how individuals can be used as tools by intelligence agencies, it also shows how her testimony years later serves to call official truths into question and fuel suspicion that power always operates in the shadows.

However, details of Operation 40, a covert CIA unit involved in assassination attempts against Castro and other covert activities, were also included in his report. “In your work for the CIA Operation 40, was that one of the major tasks you undertook was to transport guns?” (Lane, 1991, p. 301). Operation 40 was a CIA try that began during Dwight Eisenhower’s administration and continued during John F. Kennedy’s. It was set up in response to Fidel Castro’s growing influence in Cuba and his links with the URSS, which alarmed the United States and its allies in Latin America. Operation 40 involved not only the CIA but also members of the Cuban counter-revolution and the mafia underworld. Individuals such as David Morales, E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis were involved in sabotage, drug trafficking and mafia activities in Cuba. The goals of these operations were often not only to overthrow Castro, but also to defend the political and economic interests of the United States and companies that had lost property in Cuba after the revolution.

Lorenz claimed to have been part of a team that transported weapons and classified documents to Dallas in the days leading up to JFK’s assassination. “What kind of weapons were there?” “Handguns and automatics” (Lane, 1991, p. 300). She further stated that, realising the magnitude of the operation, she decided to withdraw. Her testimony carries significant weight when, asked about the names of those who travelled with her from Miami to Dallas before Kennedy’s assassination, she responds with the direct and disturbing phrase: “They

killed Kennedy. I don't want to be the one to give their names — it's too dangerous" (Lane, 1991, p. 300).

This statement indicates not only that she was not only directly connected with the supposed criminals, but also that she had knowledge of a real conspiracy. By refusing not to reveal names due to fear, Lorenz alludes to the existence of a powerful and dangerous network, thereby reinforcing the argument that JFK's assassination was not an isolated act, but rather part of a far-reaching covert operation. Their silence cannot be interpreted as ignorance, but rather as a form of self-defence. This self-censorship, driven by the fear of reprisals, serves as further evidence of the influence that those involved in the assassination still held.

For Mark Lane, including such statements is not just about showing witnesses; it is also about exposing the barriers of fear that still prevent the full truth from being known. Of particular concern is the revelation that Lorenz confessed years later that she was very frightened, saying, "You don't know these people. They have killed and would not hesitate to kill again" (Lane, 1991, p. 291). Lane is making it clear that these are not simply common criminals, but individuals who, based on his own experience, are deeply linked to power structures capable of acting with impunity. This statement reinforces the idea that the figures involved in the conspiracy she describes had not only the means to execute an assassination such as Kennedy's, but also the disposition to eliminate any inconvenient witnesses. The tone of her warning is not intended to convince, but to warn. Lorenz is not speculating, but speaking out of real fear for her life. The phrase also suggests that silence is not just a choice, but a necessity for survival. Additionally, she mentioned Jack Ruby's presence in Dallas prior to the murder, raising the possibility that Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, was also connected to this covert CIA group. "Had you ever seen Jack Ruby before November 21, 1963?" (Lane, 1991, p. 299).

### **E. Howard Hunt's Trial**

One of the most frequently mentioned names in connection with the plots surrounding JFK's assassination is E. Howard Hunt. Hunt, a former CIA operative with experience in covert operations, always denied any connection to the events of November 22, 1963. Mark Lane is relevant in this context because he was one of the lawyers who represented Edward Hunt at his trial and *Liberty Lobby*, he believed in his innocence, but throughout the trial there were several revelations, witnesses and official documents that suggests "nothing is what it seems". Lane describes that "The attempt was obviously to demystify the Hunt aura; to explain to the jury that this man who had been branded as a criminal by his government was, in fact, a decent,

patriotic, and brave American who had served his nation at great personal risk. He was, in fact, a war hero and then some” ( Lane, 1991, p. 248).

However, an article published in the *Sunday News Journal* on August 20, 1978, entitled “Was Howard Hunt in Dallas the Day JFK Died ?” generates doubts about Edward Hunt’s presence on the day of Kennedy’s assassination and a possible hiding of his presence in Dallas by the CIA could be an attempt of institutional cover up. In addition, a secret 1966 CIA memo suggests that E. Howard Hunt was in Dallas on the day of Kennedy’s assassination (Trento & Powers, 1978, n.p.). The persistent denial by Hunt, who claimed “I was driving with my late wife on H Street near 8th or 9th Street where we first heard of the Kennedy shooting on our car radio” (as cited in Lane, 1991, p. 272) makes us believe that he is really telling the truth.

While some accounts, such as that of Ellis Rubin, exclude Hunt’s presence in Dallas, others, such as that of his colleague Kuzmuk, place him there, leaving some uncertainty or trying to incriminate him because he knows a lot of CIA’s covert operations. This leads to the principle of “nothing happens by accident” that possible witnesses and their testimonies could have been part of a strategy to incriminate and discredit Hunt for silencing him, because he knew in detail about the cover operations of the CIA.

There is a clear example in one of the statements of Edward Hunt in his trial that he mentioned: “I did not meet Frank Sturgis until the spring of 1972, the introduction being performed by and at the office of Bernard L. Barker” (Lane, 1991, p. 273). This statement was a lie and there is a witness that can demonstrate it. Marita Lorenz in her testimony said that she participated with Hunt and Sturgis in Operation 40, one of the CIA’s most important covert operations, designed to eliminate political or military figures considered to be traitors or threats to national security and in the Bay of Pigs failure. According to Lorenz, Eduardo, “is his code name; the real name is E. Howard Hunt” and they even asked her “Who did you witness make payments to Mr. Sturgis? and she answered “a man by the name of Eduardo” (as cited in Lane, 1991, p. 294). The most surprising revelation is the question that they interrogated to Lorenz “Did you go on a trip with Mr. Sturgis from Miami during November of 1963?” where she answered “Yes” (Lane, 1991, p. 295). This demonstrates that “everything is connected” and that “nothing is what it seems” because if Hunt lies about having met Sturgis, this means that he also can be lying about his participation in covert operations and probably in the Kennedy assassination.



## **Oswald's Role**

The second important context is Lee Harvey Oswald's stay in Mexico City and the evidence presented to the Warren Commission, where a possible connection with the CIA is presented. As previously discussed in the section on conspiracy theories, these can be divided into two broad categories: petty and world conspiracies. In this case, the presence of a world conspiracy theory became evident, in which a powerful organization with unlimited aims, the CIA, acts as the central agent. This theory suggests that the agency, in order to preserve its image and avoid being identified as the main responsible behind Kennedy's assassination, used its influence to hide its direct involvement by presenting Oswald as the principle responsible of Kennedy's death. Following this logic, the CIA not only manipulated evidence but also influenced witnesses creating an official narrative that incriminated Oswald. However, it is possible to identify the three fundamental principles of conspiracy theories with the facts that Lane described.

The first principle that can be clearly recognized is that of "everything is connected". This principle gains strength when examining Lee Harvey Oswald's connections with two of the most powerful government agencies: the FBI and the CIA. According to Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr, "Oswald's FBI number, as assigned to him by the bureau, was S-172 or S-1 79. Oswald was being paid two hundred dollars per month by the FBI and in return was performing various tasks pursuant to FBI directives" (Lane, 1991, p. 55). This suggests an active relationship with the agency before the assassination. Furthermore, the testimony of Orest Peña, an informant who worked with both the FBI and the CIA "told me that Oswald had worked for the FBI . . . He said the CIA was aware of the relationship; deBrueys had introduced Oswald to contacts known by Pena to be CIA through his service to the agency in providing lodging for Cuban defectors" (Lane, 1991, p. 55-56). These two connections call into question the official narrative that Oswald acted alone, and instead suggests that he may have been manipulated by both intelligence services simultaneously. The idea that the FBI may have covered up this relationship to protect its image and that the CIA denied its involvement, reinforces the idea that these main figures were interconnected through Oswald.

The second principle, "nothing happens by accident", can be identified in the destruction of the letter that Oswald sent to the FBI three days before the assassination. This act was not accidental; it suggests intentional cover up. "Hosty testified that two hours after Oswald's death he was ordered by his superior, Gordon Shanklin, special agent in charge, to destroy the note" (Lane, 1991, p. 56). If the letter contained incriminating information or revealed the relationship between Oswald, the FBI and the CIA, its destruction would serve to

protect the Bureau's image and avoid public scandal. The letter said, according to Hosty: "If you have anything you want to learn from me, come talk to me directly. If you don't cease bothering my wife, I will take appropriate action and report this to the proper authorities" (Lane, 1991, p. 56). After Oswald's death, the authorities confiscated his notebook, which contained Hosty's name, badge number and telephone number. However, the Warren Commission decided to withhold the page containing this information, suggesting a deliberate attempt to conceal the connection between Oswald and the FBI. Although Oswald was already dead and unable to refute any accusations, the FBI still had strong reasons to hide or manipulate evidence especially with this political context. Revealing any link between Oswald and the FBI, or exposing failures and cover ups, could have provoked a major scandal, undermining confidence in both the investigation and the government. A *New York Times* article reveals that the decision to destroy the letter was made at a meeting of senior FBI officials in Washington, and Hoover subsequently reprimanded several agents and suspended Hosty for his handling of the case (Waldron, 1975).

Thanks to this revelation that Hoover reprimanded several agents and suspended Hosty reinforces the principle of "nothing happens by accident". What reasons might the agency have had for suspending them? Rather than being a spontaneous disciplinary action, this action can be interpreted as a calculated strategy designed to hide multiple purposes. Firstly, may be to prevent future risks of revelations, as these persons had direct access to important information, in this case, Oswald's letter, which could have compromised the official narrative. Secondly, the expulsions sent a clear message within the Bureau that any variation from the approved version of events would have serious consequences. Finally, it was a safer manner to distance the agency from those who had been disloyal and that might use damaging information. This removal of agents can mean an intent to secure the agency's interests and reinforcing the idea that every action taken was to protect the institution.

In the end, most of the facts that Lane explains in his chapter belong to the principle "nothing is what it seems". From the beginning, the CIA began constructing a narrative to implicate Oswald. The most obvious one is the manipulation of the CIA presenting a photograph as evidence that Oswald had been involved in espionage activities, but this picture was neither clear nor truthful. "The photograph of the man entering an embassy in Mexico City, which Warren had been assured had depicted Oswald's treasonous act, was not a picture of Oswald" (Lane, 1991, p. 61). Oswald's mother, Marguerite, initially did not recognise the man in the photograph and later misidentified him as Jack Ruby. Despite this confusion, the Warren Commission did not further investigate the authenticity of the photograph and accepted

without question the official version provided by the CIA. This shows how the official investigation was influenced by a narrative conveniently aimed at linking Oswald to the country's enemies, such as the Soviet Union and Cuba (Lane, 1991, p. 62). This means that by presenting an unverified image as evidence that Oswald had visited the Soviet Embassy, the CIA added a level of suspicion and danger to his profile. This suggests that the photograph was not used to discover the truth, but rather to construct a narrative: that Oswald was a traitor working with the enemy. In this way, manipulating visual evidence was used as a tool to justify him as the lone assassin.

The CIA, to continue with his constructing narrative, also altered with evidence of a recorded telephone call between Oswald and the Soviet Embassy. The recording shows only that someone identifying himself as Oswald made a call asking for a message and mentioning Comrade Kostin (Lane, 1991, p. 63). However, the CIA provided no conclusive evidence that Oswald was the person who made the call. Moreover, the CIA refused to allow the Warren Commission to listen to the recording, suggesting manipulation or fabrication of the evidence. The FBI's initial report, based on interviews with Oswald and listening to the recording, concluded that the voice on the recording did not belong to Oswald, exposing a major contradiction in the official narrative (Lane, 1991, p. 64). This means that there was something they did not want to come to light. If the recording had really proven that Oswald was involved, there would have been no reason to restrict access to it. Even someone could have passed as Oswald during the call, in order to create a link between the Soviet embassy and reinforce the idea that he was a spy and a traitor. This would explain why the CIA preferred to hide the recording because listening to it could contradict the whole set up.

Finally, the bus tickets discovered by Oswald's widow, Marina Oswald, present a new uncertainty about Oswald's movements on his trip to Mexico and his return to the United States. Despite the CIA's claim that Oswald returned by bus, the Warren Commission was unable to obtain verifiable evidence to support this claim (Lane, 1991, p. 66). The lack of records confirming his travel raises doubts about the authenticity of the documents presented. The CIA's failure to provide bus tickets during a critical period of the investigation (from March to September 1964) suggests the tampering with or loss of key evidence and reinforces the perception that the CIA may have altered crucial information to conceal important details about Oswald's case and his involvement in the Kennedy assassination.

However, the most important evidence of this principle is the testimony of Silvia Duran that is one of the most obvious manipulations concerning Oswald's trip to Mexico City, that

Lane included in his book. In this process, the CIA also took it upon itself to silence Silvia Duran by arresting her and placing her in solitary confinement in a Mexican prison on CIA orders to prevent her from speaking out about the US involvement in her arrest. The Mexican authorities were ordered to take full responsibility for the arrest in order to conceal the CIA's involvement. After Duran signed an incriminating statement about Oswald, she was released, but shortly afterwards the CIA ordered her re-arrest to ensure that she did not change her testimony. The director of the CIA sent a cable to the CIA office in Mexico City: "Arrest of Silvia Duran is extremely serious matter which could prejudice U.S. freedom of action on entire question of Cuban responsibility" (Lane, 1991, p. 59-60). This declassified document (Sylvia Duran's Previous Statement Re Lee Harvey Oswald's Visit To The Cuban Consulate In Mexico, 2003) presents the versions given by Silvia Duran in her statements. In the version of the interview used by the Warren Commission, Silvia stated that Oswald had applied for a transit visa to travel to Russia via Cuba, "presented evidence that he had been in Russia for three years, that he was married to a Russian woman, and that he was the leader of an organisation in New Orleans called Fair Play for Cuba" (Sylvia Duran's Previous Statement Re Lee Harvey Oswald's Visit To The Cuban Consulate In Mexico, 2003, p. 2). She further noted that Oswald insisted on the urgency of his request, as "he was in a great hurry to obtain a visa to go to Russia" (Sylvia Duran's Previous Statement Re Lee Harvey Oswald's Visit To The Cuban Consulate In Mexico, 2003, p. 2). In the original version of the interrogation, however, she mentions the same thing, but avoids the detail that Oswald wore glasses (Sylvia Duran's Previous Statement Re Lee Harvey Oswald's Visit To The Cuban Consulate In Mexico, 2003, p. 6). This argument is used to demonstrate how intelligence agencies can control both the information and the people involved in order to construct a desirable official narrative. On the outside, her testimony in the Warren Commission looks legitimate and voluntary, but it is here presented as obtained under coercion. Duran was arrested under direct orders from the CIA to prevent her from speaking freely about what she knew. Moreover, Mexican officials were forced to take responsibility for the arrest in order to hide US involvement. This clearly shows that what was presented as a legal investigation was, in fact, a covert operation managed by the CIA behind the dark. Furthermore, the inconsistencies between the two different versions of Duran's interrogations support this principle.

## **Conclusion: Effect on American Society**

The assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 was not only a tragic event in US history, it also marked the beginning of a significant change in the relationship between the American people and their government. As official authorities provided answers that did not satisfy a significant percentage of the population, conspiracy theories arose that questioned everything from the identity of the assassins to the integrity of government institutions. These theories, initially provoked by the lack of transparency surrounding Kennedy's death, rapidly expanded to every corner of American society.

The media, the reflections of journalists and witnesses of the time highlight the lasting impact of the assassination on the culture and national consciousness. Journalist Bob Schieffer, who was on the scene at the time of the assassination, writes in an article in TCU magazine that that day was the end of innocence for the country. According to Schieffer, "people remember because [it was] so overpowering", noting that "it was the weekend that changed America" (Schieffer, as cited in Wpengine & Wpengine, 2019, n.p.). Before this tragic event, Americans had seen the president as an almost untouchable figure, a kind of superhuman. This event not only changed the public's perception of the presidency, it forever altered the way Americans interacted with the news. Schieffer recalled that previous to that day, most of the country was informed by print media or traditional television newscasts. But that weekend saw a revolution in the way information was used: "For the first time in its history — all focused on one news story at the same time ... television would be the place most people would get their news" (Schieffer, as cited in Wpengine & Wpengine, 2019, n.p.). This change was particularly noticeable in the way the public began to view the news process. "Up until that weekend, most people all they knew about news was the news product — a story written and edited in a newspaper. They saw a story edited on television. That weekend, [they] saw the news process, and people discovered it's not always orderly. It doesn't always make sense" (Schieffer, as cited in Wpengine & Wpengine, 2019, n.p.). That was the moment when Americans began to see what happened with the news, leading to a new understanding and, in many cases, a greater distrust of the media.

The persistence of these theories, however, is explained not only by the shock of his assassination, but also by the symbolic and transformative role that President Kennedy played in the American society of his time. In a column for CNN, Tony Badger answers the question of why Kennedy remains so powerful today: "He was the modern American president who was most comfortable in his own skin, who surrounded himself with intellectuals and delighted in

their company” (Badger, 2013, n.p.). His mandate represented a presidency open to change and reflection, a break with the conservative model that had prevailed during the Cold War. As such, Kennedy represented to society a figure of hope for a generation marked by the struggle for civil rights, geopolitical tensions and the fear of nuclear war. His reformist vision, oratorical skills and commitment to the people made him a symbol of progress and renewal (Badger, 2013). Many years after his assassination, there are still many unanswered questions. In fact, the current US president, Donald Trump, signed Executive Order 14176 in January 2025, which ordered the declassification of records related to the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. As a result, the National Archives released more than 80,000 documents related to Kennedy’s assassination, something he had already tried to make public during his first term (Federal Register, 2025). In October 2017, in partial compliance with the JFK Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 (a law that mandated the full release of the files by 2017, except for national security reasons), president Donald Trump approved the release of thousands of documents related to the assassination. However, at the last minute and under pressure from agencies such as the CIA and FBI, he decided to delay the full release of some files for another six months, and then extended that period (Riechmann, 2018). It was not until December 2022, under the administration of Joe Biden, that another significant set of documents was released, although some remain classified to this day. Trump has expressed his desire to know as much as possible about the Kennedy case, saying at the time that “[t]hey’ve been waiting for that for decades” (Turan, 2025).

The aim of this dissertation was to analyse the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) involvement in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy through Mark Lane *Plausible Denial*, by using the theoretical framework of the three fundamental principles of Michael Brakun that allows us to understand how conspiracy theories emerge not from irrational speculation, but from justified doubting established in institutional mistrust. Throughout the study it has become clear that the relationship between Kennedy and the CIA was marked by deep tension. From the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion to the conflict over covert operations in Cuba, the president showed a clear desire to limit the agency’s power, going so far as to consider dismantling it. This stance portrayed him as a danger figure to established interests within the national security apparatus.

The analysis of testimonies such as that of Marita Lorenz, the trial of E. Howard Hunt, the existence of Operation 40, and Oswald’s role reveals that all these elements are interconnected either within the same historical and political context or through the relationships among those involved. However, not everything is what it seems as there is a

clear manipulation, destruction of evidence, and alteration of testimonies that lead us to question if the events really happened as they have been presented, or if there were hidden forces operating behind the scenes, such as the CIA. This manipulation not only affects public perception but it is also connected to the events themselves, designed to protect certain interests and hide the truth. If they need to scapegoat someone or something, they will do, in a way that looks like an accident or coincidence, complicating the search for the real facts.

In conclusion, although it cannot be said with certainty that the CIA was directly responsible for Kennedy's assassination, there are sufficient elements to justify reasonable doubt and a profound questioning of the official version based on the logic of conspiracy thinking found in Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial*.

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