

## Estes, LBJ and Dallas

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Among the Kennedy assassination buffs there is little public interest in the thesis that the network of vice president Lyndon Baines Johnson did the dirty deed. Of the major researchers only Larry Hancock has done any work on it.<sup>1</sup> The only critique I have seen so far is Vasilios Vazakas with Seamus Coogan and Phil Dragoo, 'Evaluating the Case against Lyndon Johnson'.<sup>2</sup> They point out that the handful books proposing the thesis are not very good (I've read two of them and I agree about one but not the other) and that the evidence in the shape of testimony comes mostly from unreliable witnesses: Loy Factor, Billie Sol Estes, Barr McClellan and Howard Hunt. And that's true up to a point. Loy Factor was brain damaged during military service; Estes was a convicted fraudster; Hunt's claims were those a dying CIA officer whose role within the CIA had included disinformation; and McClellan's 'evidence' was merely the statement of a third party buried in a book mixing fact with fiction. But many of the witnesses in other versions of the story can be portrayed as unreliable: intelligence officers of one stripe or another, for example, or the anti-Castro Cubans, and assorted military and right-wing activists, all of whom have axes to grind. If we are to wait for the people with white hats on to testify we will wait forever.

The most important of these witnesses is Billie Sol Estes. The problem with Estes is that he has talked for years about tape recordings he made with some of the people he claims were in the plot, notably Cliff Carter, LBJ's right-hand man, but has never let anyone hear them. We only have Estes' word for the contents (or for the tapes' existence; they may not exist at all). But even without the tapes, considering the

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1 <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=2380>> and <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=2379>> Careful, methodical, excellent bits of research.

2 <[www.ctka.net/2012/Evaluating\\_the\\_Case\\_against\\_Lyndon\\_Johnson.html](http://www.ctka.net/2012/Evaluating_the_Case_against_Lyndon_Johnson.html)>

significance of his role in the politics of this period, both Texan and national (he made the cover of *Time* in 1962), it is odd that Estes' claims are so widely dismissed because of his fraud conviction. Does this mean we should dismiss all statements made by people with criminal convictions? Gordon Liddy, for example? In this country, former Cabinet ministers Jonathan Aitken and Chris Huhne? Is a 'disgraced politician' *per se* unreliable? In practice, of course, we don't do this. A criminal conviction is merely one factor in our assessment of a person's reliability. Aitken was guilty of lying in court – yet his accounts of his political life will not be dismissed out of hand because of that. Estes seems to be treated harshly: because he has a conviction, nothing he says can be believed. Well, let's not believe it; in practice there isn't enough evidence to believe or disbelieve much of it; but let us consider it.

The most complete account in English by Estes of the assassination conspiracy is in his 2005 book, *Billie Sol Estes: a Texas Legend*.<sup>3</sup> This book appeared after a French book about Estes, *Le Dernier Témoin* (The Last Witness) and that book's author, French journalist William Reymond, says of the Estes book:

'The book is a first draft that Tom Bowden and myself wrote back in 2000. This draft was used by the publisher to shop the project around. It was a failure and one reason was that lot of BSE's claims were not backed by fact and some of them were in direct conflict with other evidences.'<sup>4</sup>

In other words: Estes' claims had no back-up evidence and his thesis differs from that of others. OK; but even so this is Estes' version of events.

Estes says that Kennedy was killed by Texas conspiracy, run by the senior member of LBJ's network, Cliff Carter, who gave the job of organising the actual shooting to the network's assassin, Malcolm Wallace. Estes knows this because Cliff Carter told him about it. It was believed by some

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<sup>3</sup> This can be read at <<https://www.box.com/s/8b408e6999f8799dfd0a/1/251450825/1960277221/1>>.

<sup>4</sup> <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=2379>>

in Texas at the time that the same network had been killing people in Texas since 1951 (when Wallace received a five year suspended sentence for a first degree murder). In Estes' version the JFK killing is merely one element in the wider scandal, the core of which were his secret payments to politicians, notably vice president Johnson. This is a story about American politics and business and what happens when the hidden business funding is threatened with exposure.

When the story of Estes' business dealings began to surface nationally in 1962 after reports in a local Texas paper, two things happened. In Texas a cover-up took place and potential witnesses began dying, 'committing suicide'. Although there was apparently little medical or police interest in these deaths in rural Texas, and there is nothing more than reports of their existence, it has been presumed, initially by some people in Texas, that these 'suicides' were murders done to cover-up the Johnson-Estes connection.<sup>5</sup> The first of them, that of Department of Agriculture official Henry Marshall, certainly was a murder covered-up as 'suicide'; and it is difficult to see a motive for the killing and the subsequent cover-up beyond stopping Marshall's inquiry into Estes' business.<sup>6</sup> Estes says the murder was done at LBJ's behest after Marshall refused to be bribed.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, in Washington, Robert Kennedy, Attorney General and head of the US Justice Department, used the Department's resources to investigate Estes.<sup>8</sup>

LBJ had become vice president by accident. The Kennedys offered it to him as a kind of courtesy, assuming he would turn it down. (Why would he give up being the boss of the Senate for a useless, ceremonial post?) But he accepted

<sup>5</sup> This is heavily implied in J. Evetts Haley's *A Texan Looks At Lyndon* (Canyon, Texas: Palo Duro Press, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> Estes testified at a 1984 grand jury hearing on the death of Marshall. Texas Ranger Clint Peoples had not accepted the 'suicide' verdict on Marshall and persuaded Estes to testify when he came out of prison for the second time. These events are discussed on Estes' own site at <<http://billiesolestes.com/billie>>.

<sup>7</sup> Estes says in his memoir that had he not taken the precaution of taping his calls, and letting the Johnson network know he had done so, he would have joined that list of the dead.

<sup>8</sup> See <[http://billiesolestes.com/houston\\_chronicle\\_july\\_23\\_1996](http://billiesolestes.com/houston_chronicle_july_23_1996)>

and they were stuck.<sup>9</sup> Robert Kennedy and LBJ hated each other; and Robert Kennedy was collecting dirt on Johnson hoping to produce a scandal big enough to get him off the Democratic 'ticket' for the 1964 presidential elections. Estes in his memoir says, 'Attorney General Robert Kennedy [was] doing everything in his power to tie Lyndon to me' (p. 142); which seems undeniable: had Kennedy not wanted dirt on Estes and Johnson why dispatch a large Justice Department task force to Texas?

The Justice Department was also leaking information on another Johnson-linked scandal, that involving LBJ's former Senate aide Bobby Baker, to *Life* magazine. The Kennedys were using the power of the state in an attempt to destroy the political career of their own vice president. *Life* was about to publish a feature on LBJ and Baker when Kennedy was shot. The LBJ feature was replaced by *Life's* account of the assassination.<sup>10</sup>

In Estes' account the assassination was 'just a country turkey shoot with some country boys doing the shooting'. He claims he was told about the details by Cliff Carter and it is as the buffs always presumed: frame Oswald, kill Oswald while arresting him, use local law enforcement – interestingly the Sheriff's Department, not the Dallas Police Department – to control things.

'The plan was to make the murder easy but surround it with illusions and false leads.....[Carlos] Marcello arranged for some of his people to be in Dallas and [Santos] Trafficante contributed some of his contacts in the French drug connection.' (p. 147)

Estes tells us:

- \* Malcolm Wallace knew George de Mohrenschildt and through him Wallace met Oswald and his wife Marina. (p. 151).
- \* Cliff Carter and Wallace knew Jack Ruby. Estes saw Wallace and Ruby together at the Carousel Club. (p. 151)
- \* Malcolm Wallace knew Ruth and Michael Paine. (Estes adds

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9 The best account of this is in Robert Caro's 2012 *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power*, chapter 4.

10 <[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JFKwagenvoord.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JFKwagenvoord.htm)>

that he doesn't know what this means.)

\* The boarding house at Oak Cliff at which Lee Oswald lived for a while was a CIA safe-house.

Most interesting of all, he claims that Carter arranged for a mortician, John Ligget,<sup>11</sup> to obtain another body, one resembling JFK, which was then fixed so that it had wounds resembling the wounds being reported from Parkland Hospital to which the dying JFK had been taken. Estes says: 'Cliff was very proud of this solution. He spent considerable time describing the operation to me.' (p. 155) He also comments:

'I do not know all the details except I know there were two bodies at Bethesda and at least ten pictures were taken of each body. The pictures were then mixed, creating the effect of a third body. The grand conspiracy theory of controlling the autopsy and making changes [to the body] at Bethesda Naval Hospital was not necessary. You simply needed the right mix of autopsy photographs.' (p. 156)

But the plan to get the second body to Bethesda almost came unstuck because of the Secret Service's rush to get out of Dallas with JFK's body. Hence, says Estes, the strange affair of LBJ insisting on being sworn-in as president, and by a particular local judge, before take-off for Washington: it was simply a stalling tactic.

Some of this explains features in the assassination. The use of mafia and French drug network personnel as decoys may explain the presence of Jim Braden on Dealey Plaza, the accounts of a French criminal, Jean René Souêtre, being present; and the apparently widespread knowledge among the Mob that the assassination was going to happen in Dallas. The two bodies may explain the contradictions in the autopsy photographs and the second autopsy.

There are other fragments of evidence supporting this thesis: Barr McClellan knew Wallace and confirms that he was

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11 On Estes' account a serial killer!

part of the Johnson network.<sup>12</sup> Loy Factor's fragmented stories support the thesis of Wallace as one of the assassins in Dallas;<sup>13</sup> the fact that Robert Caro has omitted Estes entirely from his most recent volume of LBJ's biography which covers this period suggests that, for whatever reason, the subject is too hot for him to handle.<sup>14</sup>

And there is Wallace's fingerprint apparently found on the 6th floor of the Book Depository on the day of the shooting. Two fingerprint analysts found a match between Wallace's print and the previously unidentified print found on the 6th floor that day. But in a bulletin for fingerprint experts it has been argued that there is no match.<sup>15</sup> If this bulletin is correct, we have a bizarre, even preposterous coincidence: a print, which isn't Wallace's, but is close enough to fool two print analysts, just happens to turn up on the 6th floor.

But we need those Estes tapes. Without them this will

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<sup>12</sup> Larry Hancock has assembled other evidence documenting Wallace's presence in LBJ's circle. See <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=2321>>.

<sup>13</sup> The Loy Factor story, in *The Men on the 6th Floor* (<<http://home.earthlink.net/~sixthfloor/>>) is the more convincing to me because Factor remembered Wallace only as 'Wallace' - didn't know his first name or who he was. The book, for which the Website is a come-on, is an account of the authors - who knew little about the case - finding out who 'Wallace' was and educating themselves *en route*. Vasilios Coogan and Dragoo (see note 2) disparage the Factor story, not least because it seems absurd to them that after the assassination, on Factor's account, Wallace dropped Factor at a bus stop to make his way home.

'The getaway is even more questionable: Factor was left at a bus stop to get out of town. But then Ruth Ann and Wallace thought better of it and picked him up. But yet, it was not exactly a great commando team escape. The car broke down in Oklahoma due to a bad clutch. And Factor, get this, had to hitchhike home.'

To me, however, this is one of those little details which rings true. In 1963 a poor Indian would take the bus. On my trips round America the only people I ever saw hitchhiking were Indians. Incidentally, few in the States seem to use 'Native American'. The best Website on their affairs is <<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/>>.

<sup>14</sup> I discussed this in issue 64 at <<http://lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster64/lob64-view-from-the-bridge.pdf>>

<sup>15</sup> See <<http://www.clpex.com/images/Darby-Wallace-Analysis/Erroneous-Match.htm>>.

remain an interesting, pretty plausible theory, by some distance the best we have, but a theory nonetheless.

**PS**

**S**ince I wrote this Billie Sol Estes died in Texas.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> There is a very good obituary by Michael Carlson at  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/17/billie-sol-estes>>