

Faustian Bargains
Lyndon Johnson and Mac Wallace
in the robber baron culture of Texas

Joan Mellen

London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2016, h/b, £18.99

Professor Mellen spoke about 'Mac' Wallace, who is one of the two subjects of this book, a couple of years ago in a lecture,¹ and it was clear when this book was announced that it was going to try and debunk the LBJ-dunnit thesis in the JFK assassination.

In Mellen's view, that thesis has just two planks: the fingerprint of Malcolm 'Mac' Wallace apparently found on the 6th floor of the Texas School Book Depository (TSBD hereafter) just after the assassination and the allegations of the late Billie Sol Estes. The fingerprint issue is dealt with by an expert hired by Mellen. Working with better copies of the print than those provided to the two earlier experts who found a match almost 20 years ago, Mellen's man finds that there was *no match* between the print found in Dallas and that of Wallace on file.² But as Garrick Alder showed in his essay in *Lobster*,³ fingerprint identification is not a precise science; and, as I commented before in these columns, if the print found isn't Wallace's, we have the extraordinary coincidence that a print close enough to Wallace's to convince two print experts just happens to turn up on the TSBD's 6th floor near the so-called sniper's nest.

Mellen gives us nearly 100 pages about 'Mac' Wallace, centred on his trial for murder in 1951 in an apparent 'domestic', for which he received a suspended sentence even though convicted of first degree murder; and the details of security investigations of him by the Office of Naval

1 Available on her website at <<http://joanmellen.com/wordpress/2014/04/30/lecture-two-lyndon-johnson-and-mac-wallace-sunday-april-2/>>.

2 The report of the expert is reproduced in the book but meant little to an untrained eye like mine.

3 <<http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster69/lob69-jfk-assassination.pdf>>

Intelligence when he was apparently given a managerial job in a Texas-based aerospace company. There are, however, significant questions which remain unanswered. LBJ's lawyer, John Cofer, worked on Wallace's defence; and it is clear that Wallace got his security clearance over the objections of the security people. Presumably, though not demonstrably, this influence was coming from (the then) Senator Johnson.

Why LBJ was doing all this for Wallace is unexplained. There is little on the Wallace-Johnson relationship: one suggestion from a journalist who was researching LBJ in the sixties that Wallace was some kind of fixer/fund-raiser for Johnson in Texas; and almost nothing on Wallace's putative career as a manager in the aerospace industry in Texas-based companies which benefited from the patronage of Johnson. We are told he was a 'labor relations manager', a 'personnel manager' and later 'control supervisor'; and there are some comments from a contemporary of Wallace's saying what a good colleague he was. But it has yet to be established that these were real jobs Wallace did and not cover stories for his continuing work for LBJ. In one part of his excellent analysis of the Estes-Wallace material, Larry Hancock notes:

'We know from Lucianne Cummings Goldberg that Malcolm Wallace had been in Washington D.C. in the summer of 1960 during the Kennedy/Johnson campaign, that he had frequented the campaign headquarters and was seen at least three times at campaign functions accompanied by Cliff Carter.'⁴

Was he on leave?

Mellen offers an alibi for Wallace for the assassination. His son, Michael, says that Wallace was with him at their home in California on the night of 22nd November.

'Michael does not recall what time Wallace arrived home on the night of November 22, but he feels certain that he was there. "I would bet my paycheque" he told the

⁴ <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?/topic/2321-malcolm-wallace-part-1/>>. These essays by Hancock are the place to start on Estes-Wallace. On Goldberg see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucianne_Goldberg>.

author.'

Garrick Alder made the point to me that it is entirely possible for Mac Wallace to have been in Dallas at 12.30 and back in California the same evening, especially with California time being two hours behind Texas. Despite Mellen's tremendous research none of this is clear yet.

Billie Sol Estes, who named Wallace as part of the JFK conspiracy, is dismissed after Mellen shows that he was a fraudster and a liar and compares and contrasts the many vague, contradictory and ambiguous things Estes said about the events of 22 November 1963, of which he had no firsthand knowledge any way.

But Estes is not the only source on all this. Long before his allegations had been made public, long before Estes had even started dropping hints about this, the late Lawrence 'Loy' Factor told Mark Collom that he had been recruited to fire at JFK by a man he knew only as Wallace. Factor's story was dismissed in Mellen's lecture as a 'fantasy' and here it is disposed of in one short paragraph, which concludes:

'Some have speculated that Factor learned what he did about the Kennedy assassination while reading books when he was in prison for murder.'⁵

I don't know if Factor read books about the case while in prison; but he certainly didn't learn about 'Wallace' from them, because 'Wallace' didn't appear in the JFK literature until the first 1995 edition of the Mark Collom and Glen Sample book about Factor, *The Men on the Sixth Floor*.⁶

There are two things in Factor's comments to Collom and Sample which suggest he was telling the truth. Asked about what happened in the Texas School Book Depository (TSBD) that day, he said that, after the shooting, they went out down the stairs at the rear of the building.

Question: 'What did the back look like when you went out...when you went out the back north?'

⁵ I suspect Mellen hasn't read the Sample/Collom book about Factor.

⁶ <<http://home.earthlink.net/~sixthfloor/>> Wallace's 1951 trial for the murder of John Kinser was discussed in J. Evetts Haley's *A Texan Looks at Lyndon* (1964).

Factor: 'It was kind of empty-like. It looked like some kind of dock.'

Q: 'Dock?'

Factor: 'Yeah, dock.'

Q: 'Like a loading dock?'

Factor: 'Yeah.'

Q: 'Was it concrete?'

Factor: 'No, like a porch, kinda like a porch.'

The authors comment: 'How did this Indian know that in 1963 the Texas School Book Depository had on it's north side a loading dock? (It was later removed.)'⁷

The second occurs when they are discussing what actually happened on the 6th floor of the TSBD.

Q: 'You said Oswald was looking through the scope and then handed the rifle to Wallace, right?'

Q: Factor: 'Yeah...then he leaned it against...kinda like a table saw; he had it all ready to go.' (p. 62)

The authors tracked down Harold Norman, who was working in the TSBD that day in 1963, and he told them that contractors were laying flooring on the 6th floor of the TSBD.

Q: 'So it was noisy up there you said. What was it that was noisy? Were there any kinds of saw, or machinery or anything like that?'

Norman: 'Yeah, they had one of those saws, you know, one of those table saws.' (p. 82)

In short, Factor's claim to have been recruited by 'Wallace' has not been refuted and the allegations about Wallace cannot yet be dismissed.

Interwoven with the Wallace story is a biography of LBJ, showing his corruption and the network of graft and influence he spread around him. Most of this will be familiar if you have read the Robert Caro volumes on LBJ; but not all. Going beyond the election of LBJ in 1964, where Caro ended his most recent volume, Mellen gives an account of the Israeli

⁷ Glen Sample and Mark Collom, *The Men on the Sixth Floor* (1995) p. 33

assault on the USS Liberty during the 1967 Six Days War and shows that LBJ had taken part in a conspiracy with the Israelis. The plan involved the Israelis sinking the Liberty and leaving no survivors, which would be blamed on the Egyptians. This would provide the pretext for an American air assault – with small-scale nuclear weapons – on Egyptian forces. (Operation Northwoods writ large.) US planes were in the air on their way to bomb Egypt before being recalled. This is not new information. Former *Sunday Times* journalist Peter Hounam presented it first in his book *Operation Cyanide*;⁸ but that was not published in the United States and this is the first book-based account published there of this bizarre venture.⁹

Mellen shows that by mid-1963 LBJ and his backers were facing a major crisis: his network of graft and influence was coming unstuck. Criminal and political investigations were under way into Bobby Baker, Johnson's bagman, and Billie Sol Estes, one of his major financial backers, whose huge fraud of federal funds had been made possible in part by Johnson's influence. With the Kennedys keen to remove Johnson from the ticket for the 1964 election, these inquiries were not being discouraged by the White House. Attorney General Robert Kennedy had sent a large team of investigators down to Texas to investigate Estes' fraud. Not only was Johnson's political career threatened, he might end up in jail.¹⁰ And all of his problems vanished when he became president.

Mellen's account of LBJ and, in particular, of the events while he was Vice President, puts Johnson at the top of the '*cui bono?*' list after the assassination. To make the most obvious point: what would a man willing to use nukes against one of the Soviet Union's allies in a false flag operation on behalf of Israel *not do* to secure his political position? Yet like

8 Which can still be bought on-line; or read at <<https://app.box.com/s/8b408e6999f8799dfd0a/2/251450825/7850144550/1>>. The Wiki entry on Hounam at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Hounam> looks pretty accurate to me.

9 There is a fair bit on-line about this operation, mostly taken from Hounam.

10 I can't think of a more striking example of an attempt to destroy the career of a political colleague.

most of the major Kennedy assassination researchers, Mellen does not take this seriously. In her case, this is presumably due to a career-long support for Jim Garrison whose inquiries focused on the CIA.

Nonetheless Professor Mellen has written a very good book, thoroughly documented and full of interesting and new bits and pieces.¹¹ If you haven't read Robert Caro's books on LBJ, this contains all the big stuff and it will be a revelation.

Robin Ramsay

¹¹ There is a good summary of the book's major points by Jim DiEugenio at <<https://kennedysandking.com/john-f-kennedy-reviews/mellen-joan-faustian-bargains>>.