Chapter

Eight

The Torch Is Passed: From Camelot to Hollywood on the Potomac

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Camelot. The Age of Aquarius. "All You Need Is Love." Hippies and Haight-Ashbury. "Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair." "Tune In. Turn On. Drop Out." Free love. Men on the moon. Woodstock.

It has come down as "the sixties," a romantic fantasy set to a three-chord rock beat. But the era viewed so nostalgically as the days of peace, love, and rock and roll didn't start out with much peace and love. Unless you focus on the fact that Enovid, the first birth-control pill, was approved by the FDA in 1960.

The flip side of the sixties was a much darker tune. Riots and long, hot summers. Assassinations. Rock-star obituaries etched in acid. A war that only a "military-industrial complex" could love. *Sympathy for the Devil.* Altamont Speedway.

The "bright shining moment" of the JFK years—the media-created myth of *Camelot* manufactured in the wake of Kennedy's death—began with the same Cold War paranoia that set the tone of the previous decade. The "liberal" Kennedy campaigned in 1960 as a hard-line anti-Communist, and used a fabricated "missile gap" between the United States and the Soviet Union as a campaign issue against Republican candidate Richard Nixon.

What we call the sixties ended with the death throes of an unpopular, costly war in a quagmire called Vietnam.

But it was an extraordinary era in which all the accepted orthodoxies of government, church, and society were called into question. And, unlike the glum, alienated mood of the fifties, the new voices questioning authority had a lighter side. Joseph Heller (b. 1923) was one of the first to capture the new mood of mordant humor in his first novel, *Catch-22* (1961), which was a forecast of the antimilitary mood that would form to oppose the war in Vietnam. But the new generation of poets was more likely to use an amplified guitar than a typewriter to voice its discontent. In the folk music of Peter, Paul, and Mary and Bob Dylan, and later in the rock-and-roll revolution, "counterculture" was blasting out of millions of radios and TVs. Of course, the record business found it a very profitable counterculture. And it spilled into the mainstream as entertainers like the Smothers Brothers brought irreverence to prime time—which promptly showed them the door.

The seventies got under way with the downfall of a corrupt White House in a sinkhole called Watergate. Vietnam and Watergate seemed to signal a change in the American political landscape. The years that followed were characterized by a feeling of aimlessness. Under Gerald Ford (b. 1913), who replaced the disgraced Nixon, and Jimmy Carter (b. 1924), America suffered the indignity of seeing its massive power in a seeming decline. But this slide was not the result of a superpower confrontation with the archvillain Soviets. Instead, a series of smaller shocks undid the foundation: the forming of OPEC by major oil-producing countries to place a stranglehold on the world's oil supplies; the acts of international terrorists, who struck with seeming impunity at the United States and other western powers, culminating in the overthrow of the once-mighty Shah of Iran; and the imprisonment of American hostages in the American embassy in Teheran.

More than anything else, it was that apparent decline, reflected in America's economic doldrums, that brought forth a President who represented, to the majority of Americans, the cowboy in the white hat who they always believed would ride into town. After the doubt and turmoil produced by the Seventies, Ronald Reagan (b. 1911) seemed to embody that old-fashioned American can-do spirit. For many critics, the question was who was going to do what, and to whom? A throwback to Teddy Roosevelt and his big stick, Reagan also saw the White House as a "bully pulpit." His sermon called back the "good old days"—which, of course, only appeared so good in hindsight.

Though it is still too soon to assess properly the long-term impact of his presidency, Ronald Reagan has already begun to be judged by history. To those who admire him, he was the man who restored American prestige and economic stability, and forced the Soviet Union into structural changes through a massive buildup of American defenses. To critics, he was the President who slept through eight years in office while subordinates ran the show. In some cases, those underlings proved to be corrupt or simply cynical. In perhaps the most dangerous instance, a lieutenant colonel working in the White House was allowed to make his own foreign policy.

How did Richard Nixon's five-o'clock shadow spoil his 1960 campaign for President?

"If you give me a week, I might think of one." That's what President Eisenhower told a reporter who asked what major decisions Vice-President Richard Nixon (1913–1994) had participated in during their eight years together. Although Ike later said he was being facetious, he never really answered the question, and the remark left Nixon with egg on his face and the Democrats giddy.

That was in August 1960, as Nixon and John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) ran neck-and-neck in the polls. How many wavering Nixon votes did Ike's little joke torpedo? It would have taken only a shift of about a hundred thousand votes out of the record 68,832,818 cast to change the result and the course of contemporary events.

Most campaign historians cite Ike's cutting comment as a jab that drew blood, but that was not the knockout punch in this contest. Posterity points instead to the face-off between the contenders—the first televised debates in presidential campaign his-

tory—as the flurry of verbal and visual punches from which Nixon never recovered. In particular, the first of these four meetings is singled out as the blow that sent the Vice-President to the canvas. More than 70 million people watched the first of these face-to-face meetings. Or maybe "face-to-five-o'clock shadow" is more accurate.

Recovering from an infection that had hospitalized him for two weeks, Nixon was underweight and haggard-looking for the debate. Makeup artists attempted to conceal his perpetual five-o'clock shadow with something called "Lazy Shave" that only made him look more pasty-faced and sinister. Jack Kennedy, on the other hand, was the picture of youth and athletic vigor. While radio listeners thought there was no clear winner in the debates, television viewers were magnetized by Kennedy. If FDR was the master of radio, Kennedy was the first "telegenic" candidate, custom-tailored for the instant image-making of the television age.

Broadcast on September 26 from Chicago, the first debate focused on domestic affairs, an advantage for Kennedy because Nixon was acknowledged to be more experienced in international matters. It was Nixon, after all, who had stood face-to-face with Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow, angrily wagging a finger at the Soviet leader during their "kitchen debate" in 1959. But in the first TV debate, Kennedy had Nixon on the defensive by listing the shortcomings of the Eisenhower administration. With deft command of facts and figures, Kennedy impressed an audience that was skeptical because of his youth and inexperience. He stressed his campaign theme that the Republicans had America in "retreat," and he promised to get the country moving again.

The audience for the three subsequent debates fell off to around 50 million viewers. The impressions made by the first debate seemed to be most lasting. Kennedy got a boost in the polls and seemed to be pulling out in front, but the decision was still too close to call. Invisible through most of the contest, Eisenhower did some last-minute campaigning for Nixon, but it may have been too small an effort, too late.

Two events in October also had some impact. First, Republican Henry Cabot Lodge promised that there would be a Negro in

the Nixon cabinet. Nixon had to disavow that pledge, and whatever white votes he won cost him black support. A second Kennedy boost among black voters came when Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested prior to the final debate. Kennedy called King's wife, Coretta, to express his concern, and Robert Kennedy helped secure King's release on bail. Nixon decided to stay out of the case. King's father, who had previously stated he wouldn't vote for a Catholic, announced a shift to Kennedy. "I've got a suitcase of votes," said Martin Luther King, Sr., "and I'm going to take them to Mr. Kennedy and dump them in his lap." He did just that. When Kennedy heard of the senior King's earlier anti-Catholic remarks, he won points by humorously defusing the situation, commenting, "Imagine Martin Luther King having a bigot for a father. Well, we all have fathers, don't we?"

Kennedy certainly had a father. Joseph Kennedy, Sr., FDR's first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission and later his ambassador to Great Britain, where his anti-Semitic and isolationist views won him no points, stayed in the background in the campaign. Bankrolling and string-pulling, Joseph Kennedy had orchestrated his son's career from the outset with his extensive network of friends in the media, the mob, and the Catholic church. A few examples: Writer John Hersey's "Survival," the now-deflated account of Kennedy's wartime heroics aboard PT-109, overlooked the fact that Kennedy and his crew were sleeping in a combat zone when a Japanese destroyer rammed them. Joe Kennedy made sure his son was decorated by a high-ranking navy official. When JFK ran for the House, Joe arranged for the Hersey article to appear in *Reader's Digest* and then made sure every voter in Kennedy's district got a copy. Publication of JFK's first book, *Why England Slept,* was arranged by Kennedy pal journalist Arthur Krock, who then reviewed the book in the *New York Times.* Kennedy's second book, the best-selling and Pulitzer Prize–winning *Profiles in Courage,* was the output of a committee of scholars and Kennedy speechwriter Theodore Sorensen.

Other friends of Joe Kennedy, like Henry Luce and William Randolph Hearst, had added to building the Kennedy image. Through Frank Sinatra, another Joe Kennedy crony, funds of dubious origin were funneled into the Kennedy war chest.

Through Sinatra, JFK also met a young woman named Judith Campbell, who would soon become a regular sexual partner. What Kennedy didn't know at the time was that Judith Campbell was also bedding Mafia chieftain Sam Giancanna and a mob hit man named John Roselli. In a few months, they would all converge as Giancanna and Roselli were given a "contract" to pull off the CIA-planned assassination of Fidel Castro.

The debate; his father's war chest; his appeal to women (the public appeal, not the private one, which remained a well-protected secret); the newly important black vote; vice-presidential candidate Lyndon B. Johnson's role in delivering Texas and the rest of the South all played a part in what was the closest presidential election in modern history. Nixon actually won more states than Kennedy, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. Kennedy had sewn up the biggest electoral-vote states. The margin of difference in the popular vote was less than two-thirds of a percentage point.

But close only counts in horseshoes. Despite some Republican protests of voting fraud in Illinois, Nixon went back to California after telling reporters, "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore." America got its youngest President, his beautiful young wife, its youngest Attorney General in Jack's brother Robert F. Kennedy (1925–1968), and a new royal family whose regal intrigues were masked by sun-flooded pictures of family games of touch football.

American Voices

From John F. Kennedy's inaugural address (January 20, 1961):

> Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. . . .

> Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation"—a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself.
>
> . . . And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

What happened at the Bay of Pigs?

In March 1961, during his first hundred days in office, Kennedy announced a program that perfectly symbolized his inaugural appeal to "ask what you can do for your country." The Peace Corps would dispatch the energy of American youth and know-how to assist developing nations. Directed by another family courtier, Sargent Shriver, husband of John's sister Eunice, the Peace Corps was the new generation's answer to Communism, promoting democracy with education, technology, and idealism instead of the fifties rhetoric of "containment." Linked with the Alliance for Progress, a sort of Marshall Plan aimed at Latin America, the Peace Corps was the visible symbol of the vigor that Kennedy wanted to breathe into a stale American system.

What the Peace Corps idealism masked was a continuing policy of obsessive anti-Communism that would lead to one of the great disasters in American foreign policy. This failure would bring America to its most dangerous moment since the war in Korea and, in the view of many historians, helped create the mind-set that sucked America into the Vietnamese quicksand. It took its unlikely but historically fitting name from an obscure spot on the Cuban coast, Bahía de Cochinos. The Bay of Pigs.

If the operation had not been so costly and its failed results so dangerously important to future American policy, the Bay of Pigs fiasco might seem comical, a fictional creation of some satirist trying to create an implausible CIA invasion scenario.

The plan behind the Bay of Pigs sounded simple when put to the new President by Allen Dulles (1893–1961), the legendary CIA director and a holdover from the Eisenhower era, when his

brother, John Foster Dulles (1888–1959), had been the influential Secretary of State. It was Allen Dulles's underlings who dreamed up the Cuban operation involving a force of highly trained and well-equipped anti-Castro Cuban exiles called La Brigada. Supported by CIA-planted insurgents in Cuba who would blow up bridges and knock out radio stations, the Brigade would land on the beaches of Cuba and set off a popular revolt against Fidel Castro, eliminating the man who had become the greatest thorn in the paw of the American lion. The most secret aspect of the plan, as a Senate investigation revealed much later, was the CIA plot to assassinate Castro using Mafia hit men Sam Giancanna and John Roselli, who were also sleeping with Judith Campbell, the President's steady partner. The Mafia had its own reasons for wanting to rid Cuba of Castro. (Giancanna and Roselli were both murdered mob-style in 1976. Giancanna was assassinated before he could testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee; Roselli testified, but his decomposing body was later found floating in an oil drum off Florida. Both men were believed to possess information connecting the Mafia to the assassination of President Kennedy.)

For most of the century, since Teddy Roosevelt and company had turned Cuba into an American fiefdom in the Caribbean, the island's economy was in nearly total American control. Almost all of the sugar, mining, cattle, and oil wealth of Cuba was in American hands. The Spanish-American war had also given the United States a huge naval base at Guantanamo. But American gangsters had a rich share, too. While American businessmen controlled the Cuban economy, the casinos and hotels of Havana, a hot spot in the Caribbean, were controlled by the Mafia from New Orleans and Las Vegas.

All that had come to an end in 1958, when Fidel Castro and Che Guevara marched out of the hills with a tiny army and sent dictator Fulgencio Batista into exile. At first, Castro got good press notices in the United States and made a goodwill visit to Washington, professing that he was no Communist. But that didn't last long.

By 1959, Castro had formed a ruthless, Moscow-supported military regime that jailed and murdered dissidents, ended any vestige of legal process, and put Cuba on a totally socialist footing. America was now Cuba's archenemy. Betrayed by Castro, many of the rebels who had helped Castro to power found their way to exile in Miami where they were taken into the welcoming embrace of the CIA.

Cuban Communism became a campaign issue in 1960 as Nixon and Kennedy tried to outdo each other on the Castro issue. As they campaigned, the plans for La Brigada's invasion were being hatched by the CIA, a plan that had the enthusiastic encouragement of Vice-President Richard Nixon and the nominal approval of Eisenhower. When Kennedy arrived in office, the plans only awaited the presidential okay. Briefed by Dulles himself before his inauguration, Kennedy agreed that preparations should continue. After his inauguration, momentum took over.

Franklin D. Roosevelt had his "brain trust" of academics who offered advice and counsel—which Roosevelt didn't always follow. Likewise, Kennedy surrounded himself with a group of elite academics—professors and Rhodes scholars among them. Unlike FDR's brain trust, Kennedy's "best and brightest," as they were dubbed in David Halberstam's book tracing the path of American involvement in Vietnam, were going to have enormous and disastrous influence on the course of American policy. For the most part, the best and the brightest went along with what the CIA had guaranteed was a successful plan for eliminating Castro.

The CIA planners cockily pointed to their successful 1954 Guatemala coup that had installed a pro-American regime there as proof of their abilities. But Cuba, as they were sadly going to learn, was not Guatemala. From the Cuban plan's outset, the Agency men in charge of the invasion (including a fanatical CIA operative named E. Howard Hunt, who also wrote third-rate spy novels and would later be involved in the Watergate debacle) bungled and blustered. Almost every step of the plan was misguided. The CIA overestimated themselves, underestimated Castro and the popular support he enjoyed, relied on sketchy or nonexistent information, made erroneous assumptions, and misrepresented the plot to the White House.

The secret invasion proved to be one of the worst-kept secrets in America. A number of journalists had uncovered most of the

plan, and several editors, including those at the *New York Times,* were persuaded by the White House to withhold the information. When the curtain finally came down, it was on a tragedy.

On April 17, 1961, some 1,400 Cubans, poorly trained, underequipped, and uninformed of their destination, were set down on the beach at the Bay of Pigs. Aerial photos of the beaches were misinterpreted by CIA experts, and Cuban claims that there were dangerous coral reefs that would prevent boats from landing were ignored by invasion planners, who put American technology above the Cubans' firsthand knowledge. CIA information showing the target beaches to be unpopulated was years out of date. The bay happened to be Fidel's favorite fishing spot, and Castro had begun building a resort there, including a seaside cabin for himself.

The invasion actually began two days earlier with an air strike against Cuban airfields, meant to destroy Castro's airpower. It failed to do that, and instead put Castro on the alert. It also prompted a crackdown on many suspected anti-Castro Cubans who might have been part of the anticipated popular uprising on which the Agency was counting. Assuming the success of the air strike without bothering to confirm it, the Agency didn't know Castro had a number of planes still operable, including two jet trainers capable of destroying the lumbering old bombers the CIA had provided to the invaders. But these planes wouldn't have counted for much if the air "umbrella" that the CIA had promised to La Brigada had materialized. President Kennedy's decision to keep all American personnel out of the invasion squashed that, and Castro's fliers had a field day strafing and bombing the invasion "fleet." The CIA-leased "navy" that was to deliver the invasion force and its supplies turned out to be five leaky, listing ships, two of which were quickly sunk by Castro's small air force, with most of the invasion's supplies aboard.

Cuban air superiority was responsible for only part of the devastation. Castro was able to pour thousands of troops into the area. Even though many of them were untried cadets or untrained militia, they were highly motivated, well-equipped troops supported by tanks and heavy artillery. While the invasion force fought bravely, exacting heavy casualties in Castro's troops, they

lacked ammunition and, most important, the air support promised by the CIA. Eventually they were pinned down on the beaches, while American navy fliers, the numbers on their planes obscured, could only sit and wonder why they had to watch their Cuban allies being cut to pieces. U.S. ships, their identifying numbers also pointlessly obscured, lay near the invasion beach, also handcuffed. Frustrated naval commanders bitterly resented their orders not to fire. In Washington, Kennedy feared that any direct U.S. combat involvement might send the Russians into West Berlin, precipitating World War III.

The sad toll was 114 Cuban invaders and many more defenders killed in the fighting; 1,189 others from La Brigada were captured and held prisoner until they were ransomed from Cuba by Robert Kennedy for food and medical supplies. Four American fliers, members of the Alabama Air National Guard in CIA employ, also died in the invasion, but the American government never acknowledged their existence or their connection to the operation.

What was the Cuban Missile Crisis?

Those were the immediate losses. The long-term damage was more costly. American prestige and the goodwill Kennedy had fostered around the world dissipated overnight. Adlai Stevenson, the former presidential contender serving as the U.S. representative to the United Nations, was shamed by having to lie to the General Assembly about the operation because he was misled by the White House. In Moscow, Kennedy was perceived as a weakling. Soviet leader Nikita Kruschchev (1894–1971) immediately saw the Bay of Pigs defeat as the opening to start arming Cuba more heavily, precipitating the Missile Crisis of October 1962.

When American spy flights produced evidence of Soviet missile sites in Cuba, America and the Soviet Union were brought to the brink of war. For thirteen tense days, the United States and the USSR stood toe-to-toe as Kennedy, forced to prove himself after the Bay of Pigs, demanded that the missile sites be dismantled and removed from Cuba. To back up his ultimatum, Kennedy ordered a naval blockade to "quarantine" Cuba, and

readied a full-scale American invasion of the island. On Sunday, October 28, Radio Moscow announced that the arms would be crated and returned to Moscow. Disaster was averted, temporarily.

The damage done to U.S. credibility by the Bay of Pigs fiasco had seemingly been undone. But the lesson of the foolishness of committing American military support to anti-Communism hadn't really sunk in. Kennedy was still willing to make an anti-Communist stand in the world. The next scene would be as distant from America as Cuba was close, a small corner of Asia called Vietnam.

What was The Feminine Mystique?

Every so often a book comes along that really rattles America's cage. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1850. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in 1906. In the 1940s and 1950s, John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and the Kinsey studies, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. All of these books delivered karate chops to the American perception of reality.

In 1963 it was a book that introduced America to what the author called "the problem without a name." Betty Friedan (b. 1921), a summa cum laude Smith graduate and free-lance writer who was living out the fifties suburban dream of house, husband, and family, dubbed this malady *The Feminine Mystique*.

"The problem lay buried," wrote Friedan, "unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning. . . . Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slip-cover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even herself the silent question—'Is this all?' "

The book reached millions of readers. Suddenly, in garden clubs, coffee klatches, and college sorority houses, talk turned away from man-catching, mascara, and muffin recipes. Women were instead discussing the fact that society's institutions—government, mass media and advertising, medicine and psychiatry, education and organized religion—were systematically barring them from becoming anything more than housewives and mothers.

Friedan's book helped jump-start a stalled women's-rights movement. Lacking a motivating central cause and aggressive leadership since passage of the Nineteenth Amendment after World War I (see pages 259–262), organized feminism in the United States was practically nonexistent. In spite of forces that brought millions of women into the work force—like the wartime factory jobs that made "Rosie the Riveter" an American heroine—women were expected to return to the kitchens after the menfolk came home from defending democracy. Although individuals like Eleanor Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, Margaret Sanger, and Frances Perkins—the first woman Cabinet officer and a key player in FDR's New Deal—were proven achievers, most women were expected to docilely accept the task of managing house and family, or to hold a proper "woman's job" like teaching, secretarial work, or, for the poorer classes, factory labor. In all of these jobs, women were invisible. Once married, of course, the "ideal woman" stopped working. The idea of career as fulfillment was dismissed as nonsense, and that minority of pioneer "career women" was viewed practically as a class of social deviants. Overnight, Friedan made women question those assumptions.

The Feminine Mystique had its shortcomings. It was essentially about a white, middle-class phenomenon. It failed to explore the problems of working-class, poor, and minority women, whose worries ran far deeper than personal discontent. It also ignored the fact that a substantial portion of American women were satisfied in the role that Friedan had indicted.

But the book was like shock treatment. It galvanized American women into action at the same moment that an increasingly aggressive civil rights movement was moving to the forefront of American consciousness. And it came just as the government was taking its first awkward steps toward addressing the issue of inequality of the sexes. In one of his first acts, President Kennedy had formed a Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by the extraordinary Eleanor Roosevelt, then in her seventies. In 1964 a more substantial boost came when women actually re-

King's most memorable speech was the culmination of the massive march on Washington, D.C., that drew a quarter of a million blacks and whites to the capital. In his biography of King, *Bearing the Cross*, author David J. Garrow calls the speech the "clarion call that conveyed the moral power of the movement's cause to the millions who had watched the live national network coverage. Now, more than ever before . . . white America was confronted with the undeniable justice of blacks' demands." The march was followed by passage of the Civil Rights Act, signed into law by Lyndon Johnson in June 1964, and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. King in October 1964.

Who killed JFK?

Americans probe this question like searching for a missing tooth. We keep running our tongue over the empty space.

This question has inspired a cottage industry of conspiracy theorists. In the view of an American majority, none of them has yet to answer the question to full and verifiable satisfaction. Some innate paranoia in the American makeup finds it far more appealing to believe that Kennedy's death was the result of some intricately constructed Byzantine conspiracy. The list of possible suspects reads like an old-fashioned Chinese restaurant menu. Just choose one from Column A and one from Column B. The choices include a smorgasbord of unsavory characters with the motive and ability to kill Kennedy: teamsters and gangsters; Cubans, both pro- and anti-Castro; white supremacists; CIA renegades; KGB moles; and, of course, lone assassins.

The conspiracy theories linger because the basic facts of the assassination remain shrouded in controversy. What is true is that JFK went to Texas in the fall of 1963 to shore up southern political support for a 1964 reelection bid. The Texas trip began well in San Antonio and Houston, where the President and the First Lady were met by enthusiastic crowds. Everyone agreed that Dallas would be the tough town politically, and several advisers told Kennedy not to go. A few months before, the good folks of Dallas had spat on Adlai Stevenson, JFK's UN ambassador. But even in Dallas on November 22, things were better than expected,

and crowds cheered the passing motorcade. In the fateful limousine, Texas Governor John Connally's wife leaned over and told the President, "Well, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you."

Then the car made its turn in front of the Texas Book Depository and at least three shots rang out. Kennedy and Governor Connally were hit. The limousine carrying them sped off to the hospital. The President died and Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973) took the oath of office aboard Air Force One as a shocked and bloodied Jackie Kennedy looked on. Within hours, following the murder of a Dallas policeman, Lee Harvey Oswald was in custody and under interrogation. But two days later, as Oswald was being moved to a safer jail, Jack Ruby, owner of a Dallas strip joint, jumped from the crowd of policemen and shot Oswald dead in full view of a disbelieving national television audience.

This is where controversy takes over. A grieving, stunned nation couldn't cope with these events. Rumors and speculation began to fly as the country learned of the strange life of Lee Harvey Oswald—that he was an ex-Marine who had defected to Russia and come back with a Russian wife; that he was a Marxist and a Castro admirer; that he had recently been to the Cuban embassy in Mexico City.

Responding to these rumors, which were growing to include the suggestion that Lyndon Johnson himself was part of the conspiracy, LBJ decided to appoint a commission to investigate the assassination and to determine whether any conspiracy existed. After his first week in office, Johnson asked Chief Justice Earl Warren to head the investigation. Warren reluctantly accepted the job when Johnson said that he feared nuclear war might result if the Cubans or Soviets proved to be behind the assassination.

The Warren Commission spent ten months examining the deaths of Kennedy and Oswald. Its report, released in September 1964, concluded that Oswald had acted alone and there was no evidence of any conspiracy, domestic or foreign.

But twenty-five years after the Warren Commission tried to calm a very skittish nation, those findings are still viewed skeptically by a majority of the American public. The commission's detective work left much to be desired, and in later years, major

new revelations followed. In particular, shocking facts were produced by the investigations into the activities of the CIA and the FBI during the 1970s. Among other startling discoveries, these investigations by a presidential commission and Congress uncovered the CIA's plans for assassinating Fidel Castro and other foreign leaders; that Kennedy's mistress Judith Campbell was also involved with the two gangsters hired by the CIA to kill Castro; and that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had ordered a cover-up of Bureau failures in the Oswald investigation in an effort to protect the Bureau's integrity and public image.

Were there only three shots fired by someone in the Texas Book Depository? Was Oswald the gunman who fired them? Or were other shots fired from the grassy knoll overlooking the route of the motorcade? Was Jack Ruby, who was both connected to the Dallas underworld and a friend of Dallas policemen, simply acting, as he said, to spare Mrs. Kennedy the pain of returning to Dallas to testify at a murder trial? Who were the two "Latins" that a New Orleans prostitute said she encountered on their way to Dallas a few days before the murder?

Dozens of books written during the past twenty-five years, from attorney Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* and Edward Jay Epstein's *Inquest* to David Lifton's *Best Evidence* and David Scheim's *Contract on America: The Mafia Murder of President John F. Kennedy*, have probed these and other "mysteries." All have relied on flaws in the Warren investigation and on new material the Warren Commission never saw to support a variety of possible conspiracies. All have been greeted by a public feeding frenzy.

Far less sensational is *Final Disclosure*, a 1989 book that refutes all of these theories, written by David W. Belin, the counsel to the Warren Commission and executive director of the Rockefeller Commission investigating abuses by the CIA. Obviously Belin, as a key staff member of the Warren Commission, has a personal interest to protect. But his book is well-reasoned and amply supported by evidence. Examining the Warren Commission's total evidence, the subsequent CIA and FBI revelations, and the analysis of a controversial audio tape that supposedly proved the existence of a fourth shot and a second gunman, Belin deflates the most serious charges brought by the conspiracists, often by

showing they have made highly selective use of evidence and testimony.

Even so, that missing-tooth feeling remains. Can anyone say for sure that Oswald and then Ruby acted alone? It seems that few people are willing to accept that conclusion.

American Voices

From Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" speech (May 1964):

> The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning.
>
> The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.
>
> It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.

In this speech, delivered during hs election campaign against Republican Barry Goldwater, Johnson laid out the foundation for the ambitious domestic social program he carried out after his landslide victory over the conservative senator from Arizona. Johnson proposed attacking racial injustice through economic and educational reforms and government programs aimed at ending the cycle of poverty. The legislative record he then compiled was impressive, although social historians argue over its ultimate effectiveness. The Office of Economic Opportunity was created. Kennedy's proposed Civil Rights Bill was passed, followed by a Voting Rights Act and the establishments of Project

Head Start, the Job Corps, and Medicaid and Medicare. But while Johnson was carrying out the most ambitious social revolution since FDR's New Deal, he was also leading the country deeper and deeper into Vietnam. And that futile and disastrous path, more than any of his domestic initiatives, would mark Johnson's place in history.

Did Mississippi Burning *really happen?*

If Hollywood gets its way, the civil-rights movement was saved when Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe rolled into town like two gunslinging western marshals. In this revisionist cinematic version of history, two FBI men bring truth and vigilante justice to the nasty Ku Klux Klan while a bunch of bewildered Negroes meekly stand by, shuffling and avoiding trouble.

The 1989 film *Mississippi Burning* was an emotional roller coaster. It was difficult to watch without being moved, breaking into a sweat, and finally cheering when the forces of good terrorized the redneck klansmen into telling where the bodies of three murdered civil-rights workers were buried. The movie gave audiences the feeling of seeing history unfold. But in the grand tradition of American filmmaking, this version of events had as much to do with reality as did D. W. Griffith's racist "classic," *Birth of a Nation.*

The movie opens with the backroads murder of three young civil-rights activists in the summer of 1964. That much is true. Working to register black voters, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, two whites from the North, and James Chaney, a black southerner, disappeared after leaving police custody in Philadelphia, Mississippi. In the film, two FBI agents arrive to investigate, but get nowhere as local rednecks stonewall the FBI and blacks are too fearful to act. The murderers are not exposed until Agent Anderson (Gene Hackman), a former southern sheriff who has joined the FBI, begins a campaign of illegal tactics to terrorize the locals into revealing where the bodies are buried and who is responsible.

It is a brilliantly made, plainly manipulative film that hits all the right emotional notes: white liberal guilt over the treatment of

blacks; disgust at the white-trash racism of the locals; excitement at Hackman's Rambo-style tactics; and, finally, vindication in the murderers' convictions.

The problem is that besides the murders, few of the events depicted happened that way. Pressed by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent a large contingent of agents to Mississippi, but they learned nothing. The case was only broken when Klan informers were offered a $30,000 bribe and the bodies of the three men were found in a nearby dam site. Twenty-one men were named in the indictment, including the local police chief and his deputy. But local courts later dismissed the confessions of the two klansmen as hearsay. The Justice Department persisted by bringing conspiracy charges against eighteen of the men. Tried before a judge who had once compared blacks to chimpanzees, seven of the accused were nonetheless convicted and sentenced to jail terms ranging from three to ten years.

Although J. Edgar Hoover put on a good public show of anti-Klan FBI work, it masked his real obsession at the time. To the Director, protecting civil-rights workers was a waste of his Bureau's time. Although the film depicts a black agent, the only blacks employed by the Bureau during Hoover's tenure as head, were his chauffeurs. The FBI was far more interested in trying to prove that Martin Luther King was a Communist and that the civil-rights movement was an organized Communist front. Part of this effort was the high-level attempt to eavesdrop on King's private life, an effort that did prove that the civil-rights leader had his share of white female admirers willing to contribute more than just money to the cause. Hoover's hatred of King boiled over at one point when he called King "the most notorious liar" in the country. Another part of this effort involved sending King a threatening note suggesting he commit suicide.

What was the Tonkin Resolution?

When is a war not a war? When the President decides it isn't, and Congress goes along.

America was already twenty years into its Vietnam commit-

Luther King was killed by James Earl Ray in Memphis. His death set off another wave of riots that left cities smoldering.

Who was Miranda?

No, not Carmen.

For anyone who grew up on a TV diet of Joe Friday and "Dragnet," "Streets of San Francisco," "NYPD," and a hundred other "cop" shows, "Read him his rights" is a familiar bit of requisite dialogue. That is, for any cop shows that came after 1966. To America's lawmen, that was the year that the world started to come unglued.

Ernesto Miranda was hardly the kind of guy who might be expected to change legal history. But he did, in his own savage way. A high school dropout with a criminal record dating to his teen years, Miranda abducted a teenage girl at a Phoenix moviehouse candy counter in 1963, and drove her into the desert, where he raped her. Based on his record, Miranda was soon picked up, and was identified by the victim in a police lineup. After making a written confession in which he stated that he had been informed of his rights, Miranda was convicted and sentenced to prison for forty to fifty-five years. But at the trial, Miranda's court-appointed attorney argued that his client had not been told of his right to legal counsel.

The American Civil Liberties Union took the case of *Miranda v. Arizona* all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was heard by the Warren Court in 1966. The issue was the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination. On June 13, 1966, the Court announced a five-to-four ruling in favor of Miranda that said a criminal suspect must be told of his right to silence, that his remarks may be used against him, and that he had a right to counsel during interrogation, even if he could not afford one.

Depending on your point of view, it was either a great milestone for civil liberties and the protection of the rights of both the innocent and the criminal, or the beginning of the end of civilization.

As for Miranda, he did not live long enough to see his name become part of American legal textbooks and television culture.

On the basis of new evidence, he was convicted again on the same charges of kidnapping and rape, and imprisoned. He was eventually paroled and ten years after the Court inscribed his name in legal history, Ernesto Miranda died of a knife wound suffered during a bar fight.

What happened at My Lai?

On March 16, 1968, in a small Vietnamese village, "something dark and bloody" took place. With those words, a lone veteran of the war forced the U.S. Army to reluctantly examine a secret that was no secret. America was forced to look at itself in a manner once reserved for enemies who had committed war crimes. With those words, America found out about the massacre of civilians by U.S. soldiers at My Lai.

The GIs of Charlie Company called it Pinkville. That was how it was colored on their maps of Vietnam's Quang Ngai province. Or maybe it was because the village was suspected of being a stronghold for the Vietcong. Under the command of Lieutenant William L. Calley, Charlie Company of the Americal Division's Eleventh Infantry had nebulous orders from its company commander, Captain Ernest Medina, to "clean the village out." In the previous three months, Charlie Company had taken about one hundred casualties without even seeing action. Sniper fire and booby traps were to blame. Frustrated and angry at the hand they had been dealt in a war in which there were no uniforms to separate "good gooks" from "bad gooks," the men of Charlie Company were primed to wreak havoc on a phantom enemy they had never been able to confront in an open battle.

Dropped into the village by helicopter, the men of Charlie Company found only the old men, women, and children of My Lai. There were no Vietcong, and no signs of any. There were no stashed weapons, no rice caches, nothing to suggest that My Lai was a staging base for guerrilla attacks. But under Lieutenant Calley's direct orders, the villagers were forced into the center of the hamlet, where Calley issued the order to shoot them. The defenseless villagers were mowed down by automatic-weapons fire. Then the villagers' huts were grenaded, some of them while

still occupied. Finally, small groups of survivors—some of them women and girls who had been raped by the Americans—were rounded up and herded into a drainage ditch, where they too were mercilessly machine-gunned. A few of the soldiers of Charlie Company refused to follow the order; one of them later called it "point-blank murder."

Only one American tried to intervene. A helicopter pilot saw the bodies in the ditch and went down to investigate. Placing his helicopter between the GIs and a band of children, the pilot ordered his crew to shoot any American who tried to stop him. He managed to rescue a handful of children. But that was the day's only heroic deed. Another witness to the massacre was an army photographer who was ordered to turn over his official camera, but kept a second secret camera. With it, he had recorded the mayhem in which more than 560 Vietnamese, mostly women and children, were slaughtered. Those pictures, when they later surfaced, revealed the extent of the carnage at My Lai. But not right away. Although many in the chain of command knew something "dark and bloody" had happened that day, there was no investigation. The mission was reported as a success back at headquarters.

But Ronald Ridenhour, a veteran of Charlie Company who had not been at My Lai, began to hear the rumors from buddies. Piecing together what had happened, he detailed the events in a letter he sent to President Nixon, to key members of Congress, and to officials in the State Department and Pentagon. The dirty little secret of My Lai was out. Within a few weeks the army opened an investigation. More than a year had passed since the day My Lai became a killing ground.

In the immediate aftermath of the investigation, a number of ranking officers of the Americal Division were court-martialed for dereliction of duty. At worst, they were reduced in rank or censured. Thirteen officers and enlisted men were also charged with war crimes. But of these, only Lieutenant Calley was found guilty of war crimes. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but President Nixon then reduced the sentence and changed it to house arrest in response to the outpouring of public support for Calley, who was seen as a scapegoat. Calley was later paroled. A documentary about My Lai that was broadcast in 1989 showed

Calley, a prosperous businessman, getting into an expensive foreign car and driving off. He refuses to comment on the incident.

To the war's supporters on the right, the atrocity at My Lai was an aberration and Calley a victim of a "leftist" antiwar movement. To the war's opponents, Calley and My Lai epitomized the war's immorality and injustice. In a sense, My Lai was the outcome of forcing young Americans into an unwinnable war. As others have pointed out, this was not the only crime against civilians in Vietnam. It was not uncommon to see GIs use their Zippo lighters to torch an entire village. As one officer said early in the war, after torching a hamlet, "We had to destroy this village to save it." That Alice-in-Wonderland logic perfectly embodied the impossibility of the American position.

Even though the United States would drop *7 million tons* of bombs—twice the total dropped on Europe and Asia during all of World War II—on an area about the size of Massachusetts, along with Agent Orange and other chemical defoliants, the United States was losing the war. The political and military leadership of this country failed to understand the Vietnamese character, traditions, culture, and history. That failure doomed America to its costly and tragic defeat in Vietnam.

American Voices

Astronaut Neil Armstrong (b. 1930) on July 20, 1969, as he became the first man to walk on the moon:

> That was one small step for a man and a great leap for mankind.

Armstrong's words, and the images of him stepping onto the lunar surface, were seen and heard by the entire world. The moment was the culmination of the obsessive push for putting a man on the moon, a challenge that began with the humiliation of Sputnik. (See Chapter 7.) Armstrong and fellow moon-walker Buzz Aldrin planted an American flag on the lunar surface and left a plaque that read, "Here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the moon July, 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind."

Why did Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger try to stop the New York Times *from publishing the "Pentagon Papers"?*

In the summer of 1971, President Richard Nixon learned that what you don't know *can* hurt you.

In June 1971, the *New York Times* ran a headline that hardly seemed sensational: "Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement." What the headline did not say was that the study also traced thirty years of deceit and ineptitude on the part of the United States government.

In page after numbingly detailed page, the *Times* reprinted thousands of documents, cables, position papers, and memos, all referring to the American effort in Vietnam. Officially titled *The History of the U.S. Decision Making Process in Vietnam,* the material quickly became known as the "Pentagon Papers." Richard Nixon was not aware of its existence. But it would shake his administration and the military establishment in America to their toes.

Ordered by Robert McNamara, one of Kennedy's "best and brightest" prior to his resignation as Defense Secretary in 1968, this massive compilation had involved the work of large teams of scholars and analysts. The avalanche of paper ran to some 2 million words. Among the men who had helped put it together was Daniel Ellsberg, a Rand Corporation analyst and onetime hawk who, like McNamara himself, became disillusioned by the war. Working at MIT after his resignation from Rand, which was involved in collecting and analyzing the papers, Ellsberg decided to go public with the information. He turned a copy over to *Times* reporter Neil Sheehan.

When the story broke, the country soon learned how it had been duped. Going back to the Truman administration, the Pentagon Papers revealed a history of deceptions, policy disagreements within several White House administrations, and outright lies. Among the most damaging revelations were cables from the American embassy in Saigon, dating from the weeks before Prime Minister Diem was ousted with CIA encouragement and then executed. There was the discovery that the Tonkin Resolution had been drafted months before the incident occurred from which it took its name. And there were memos showing Lyndon Johnson committing infantry to Vietnam at the same time he was telling the country that he had no long-range plans for a strategy in Vietnam.

The papers did not cover the Nixon years, and White House reaction was at first muted, even gleeful at the prospect of the embarrassment it would create for the Democrats. But Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger (b. 1923) soon realized that if something this highly classified could be leaked, so could other secrets. Both men were already troubled by leaks within the administration. How could they carry on the business of national security if documents this sensitive could be photocopied and handed out to the nation's newspapers like press releases? There was a second concern. The revelations in the Pentagon Papers had fueled the antiwar sentiment that was growing louder and angrier and moving off the campuses and into the halls of Congress.

The administration first tried to bully the *Times* into halting publication. Attorney General John Mitchell threatened the paper with espionage charges. These were ignored. Nixon then tried the courts and received a temporary injunction blocking further publication. But the brush fire started by the *Times* was growing into a forest fire. The *Washington Post* and the *Boston Globe* were also running the documents. A federal court ordered the *Post* to halt publication and the question went to the Supreme Court. On June 30, the Court ruled six to three in favor of the newspapers on First Amendment grounds.

Kissinger and Nixon went nuclear. Said Nixon, "I want to know who is behind this. . . . I want it done, whatever the costs."

When Ellsberg was revealed as the culprit, a new White House unit was formed to investigate him. Their job was to stop leaks, so they were jokingly called "the plumbers." White House assistant Egil Krogh, Nixon Special Counsel Charles Colson, and others in the White House turned to former CIA man E. Howard Hunt and ex-FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy to bring their special clandestine talents to the operation. One of their first jobs was to conduct a break-in at the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

As a burglary, it was only marginally more successful than the next break-in planned by the group, at an office complex called Watergate.

Apart from setting into motion some of the events that would mutate into the Watergate affair, the publication of the Pentagon Papers had other important repercussions. From the government's standpoint, American security credibility had been crippled, severely damaging intelligence operations around the world, for better or worse. On the other side, the antiwar movement gained new strength and respectability, increasing the pressure on Nixon to end the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. And the Supreme Court's action in protecting the newspapers from prior restraint established and strengthened First Amendment principles.

But the Pentagon Papers case also reinforced a "bunker mentality" that already existed within the White House "palace guard." There was an us-against-them defensiveness emanating from the Oval Office. Publication of the Pentagon Papers made the Nixon White House far more aggressive in its defense of "national security," an idea that was expanded to include the protection and reelection of Richard Nixon by any means and at any cost.

Why did "Jane Roe" sue Wade?

"To be or not to be." For Shakespeare and the Supreme Court, that was and is the question. There is no other issue more emotionally, politically, or legally divisive in modern America than the future of abortion rights.

Most Americans thought the question was settled on January 22, 1973. That was the day the Supreme Court decided, by a seven-to-two margin, that it was unconstitutional for states to prohibit voluntary abortions before the third month of pregnancy; the decision also limited prohibitions that states might set during the second three months.

The decision grew out of a Texas case involving a woman who, out of desire to protect her privacy, was called "Jane Roe" in court papers. "Roe" was a single woman living in Texas who

became pregnant. She desired an abortion, but was unable t
obtain one legally in her home state of Texas, and so she gav
birth to a child she put up for adoption. Nonetheless, she broug
suit against Texas in an attempt to overturn the restrictive Tex
abortion codes. The case ultimately reached the Supreme Cou
which made the decision in the case known as *Roe v. Wade.*

For sixteen years the *Roe* precedent influenced a series
rulings that liberalized abortion in America. To many American
the right to an abortion was a basic matter of private choice,
decision for the woman to make. But to millions of American
Roe was simply government-sanctioned murder.

The mostly conservative foes of legal abortion—who call the
movement "pro-life"—gained strength in the 1980s, coalescin
behind Ronald Reagan and contributing to his election. An
it will ultimately be Reagan's legacy through his appointments
the Supreme Court who determine the future of *Roe v. Wa*
In the summer of 1989, the Supreme Court decided five-to-fou
in the case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services,* to give stat
expanded authority to limit abortion rights. The Court also a
nounced that it would hear a series of cases that would give it t
opportunity to completely overturn the *Roe* decision.

American Voices

From Justice Harry A. Blackmun's majority decision in *Roe Wade* (January 22, 1973):

> The Constitution does not explicitly mention any right of privacy. In a line of decisions, however . . . the Court has recognized that a right of personal privacy, or a guarantee of certain areas or zones of privacy, does exist under the Constitution. . . . They also make it clear that the right has some extension to activities relating to marriage; procreation; contraception; family relationships; and child rearing and education.
>
> The right of privacy . . . is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. . . . We need not resolve the difficult question of when life

begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.

How did a botched burglary become a crisis called Watergate and bring down a powerful President?

Break-ins and buggings. Plumbers and perjury. Secret tapes, "smoking guns," and slush funds.

We know now that Watergate wasn't what Nixon press secretary Ron Zeigler called it, "a third-rate burglary." This nationally televised soap opera of corruption, conspiracy, and criminality only began to unravel with a botched break-in at the Watergate office complex. That ludicrous larceny was only a tiny strand in the web of domestic spying, criminal acts, illegal campaign funds, enemies lists, and obstruction of justice that emerged from the darkness as "Watergate." But it ended up with Richard Nixon resigning from the presidency in disgrace and only a few steps ahead of the long arm of the law.

After the Civil War and Vietnam, few episodes in American history have generated as many written words as the Watergate affair. Just about everybody who participated in this extraordinary chapter ended up writing a book about his view of the events. They were joined by the dozens of historians, journalists, and other writers who turned out books. The notoriety of Watergate gave convicted felon E. Howard Hunt a renewed lease on a life as a writer of inferior spy novels, a pursuit in which he was joined by John Ehrlichman and even Spiro Agnew, another of the rats who went down with the sinking ship that was Richard Nixon's second administration. Even the rabidly right-wing former FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy was able to parlay his macho, fanatical, "hand over a lighted candle" image into a lucrative career including playing guest roles on "Miami Vice," founding a "survivalist" camp to teach commando techniques to weekend warriors, and a lecture tour that pitted Liddy in the role of mad-dog

conservative against sixties relic Timothy Leary, the onetime hig priest of psychedelic drugs.

This ludicrous aftermath has been combined with some o the comical aspects of the bungled break-in and Howard Hunt' notoriously bad CIA-provided disguises to soften the image o Watergate's implications. It seems almost *opéra bouffe,* a light hearted satire. But that perspective overlooks the seriousness o the crimes committed in the name of national security an Richard Nixon's reelection—two objectives that a large number o high-placed fanatics equated with each other.

American Voices

Richard Nixon, from the Oval Office tapes:

> I don't give a shit what happens, I want you to stonewall it, let them plead the Fifth Amendment, coverup or anything else, if it'll save the plan.

A Watergate Chronology

1972

June 17 At the Watergate Office Building in Washington, D.C., five men are arrested during a pathetically bungled break-in at the offices of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). The men are all carrying cash and documents that show them to be employed by the Committee to Re-elect the President (later given the acronyn CREEP), and the purpose of the burglary is to plant listening devices in the phones of Democratic leaders and obtain political documents regarding the Democrats' campaign strategy. The men arrested include a former FBI agent and four anti-Castro Cubans who have been told that they are looking for material linking Castro to the Democratic Party. Two former White House aides working for CREEP, G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, are also arrested. Hunt, it will be learned, was one of the CIA agents responsible for planning the Bay of Pigs invasion and some of the Cubans arrested also took part in the invasion. The seven men are indicted on September 15. Even though