

Dallas, Roswell, Area 51: A Social History of American "Conspiracy Tourism."

Shelley E. McGinnis

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina of
Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the Department of Communication Studies.

Chapel Hill
2010

Approved by:

Dr. Ken Hillis

Dr. Robert Allen

Dr. Rich Cante

Dr. Patricia Sawin

Dr. Sarah Sharma

© 2010
Shelley E. McGinnis
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

SHELLEY E. MCGINNIS: Dallas, Roswell, Area 51: A Social History of American
"Conspiracy Tourism."
(Under the direction of Ken Hillis)

This dissertation focuses on conspiracy narratives that play out in particular settings, the role of mainstream media in circulating these narratives amidst local and national publics, and how these narratives become part of the cultural life of a location part of the experience of residents of and visitors to that location. Conspiracy theory is examined as an interaction between texts and cultural practices that has shaped the physical and cultural landscapes of three locations – Dallas, Texas; Roswell, New Mexico; and Rachel, Nevada (a small town adjacent to a research facility popularly known as "Area 51") – which have developed tourist industries that market, as attractions, historical associations with conspiracy theory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	v
Chapter 1: "Everybody Sees Something That They Want to See:" Narrative, Conspiracy Theory, and Tourism.....	1
Questions of Narrative.....	5
Conspiracy Theory: A Critical Approach.....	14
Questions of Tourism.....	23
Project Overview.....	30
Chapter 2: "A Sad Corner of Dallas, a Small Part of America That Belongs to Everyone:" JFK Assassination Tourism in Dealey Plaza.....	34
Chapter 3: "A Great Thing for the UFOs and the Community:" UFO Tourism in Roswell, New Mexico.....	100
Chapter 4: "Spying for the American People:" Area 51 Tourism in Nevada.....	147
Chapter 5: Civil Pilgrims and the "Powers That Be".....	187
Works Cited.....	206

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: The Conspiracy Tree.....	19
Fig. 2: The Depository as seen from Dealey Plaza.....	35
Fig. 3: The grassy knoll in 2003.....	39
Fig. 4: In 2003, a visitor takes pictures from the "Zapruder spot," where Abraham Zapruder filmed a 16 mm movie of the assassination.....	41
Fig. 5: An anonymous flyer distributed in Dallas at the time of Kennedy's visit in 1963.....	52
Fig. 6: the lobby of The Sixth Floor Museum.....	64
Fig. 7: Outside the Depository, a vendor displays a souvenir newspaper to a party of tourists.....	72
Fig. 8: Assassination researchers investigate a manhole on Elm Street from which they speculate shots might have been fired.....	89
Fig. 9: Page one of a 2003 assassination conference handout.....	91
Fig. 10: Page two of a 2003 assassination conference handout.....	92
Fig. 11: November 22, 2003. A crowd gathers at the Triple Underpass to observe the 40 th anniversary of the assassination.....	97
Fig. 12: A sign on Highway 285 north of Roswell alerts travelers to the opportunity to visit one of several local UFO crash sites.....	101
Fig. 13: Downtown Roswell store window.....	103
Fig. 14: International UFO Museum and Research Center, Roswell.....	121
Fig. 15: Downtown Roswell: Boutique Kitchen Gourmet and Alien Resistance HQ.....	128
Fig. 16: UFO Encounter '97: wide involvement from the community.....	135

Fig. 17: UFO festival as town fair: pony rides and crafts vendors.....	136
Fig. 18: Inside the IUFOMRC, visitors await an appearance by ufologist Don Schmitt.....	143
Fig. 19: Donald Schmitt talks with families of young costumers onstage at the IUFOMRC.....	145
Fig. 20: The only public accommodations for miles.....	154
Fig. 21: Photos of George Knapp and Bob Lazar displayed on the wall of the Little A'Le'Inn.....	161
Fig. 22: Inside the Little A'Le'Inn: UFO displays and a rack of T-shirts for sale.....	166
Fig. 23: The Area 51 Research Center in 1996.....	167
Fig. 24: The original Black Mailbox.....	170
Fig. 25: The white "Black Mailbox".....	171
Fig. 26: UFO photos adorn the walls of the Little A'Le'Inn.....	178
Fig. 27: "Extraterrestrial Highway" sign decorated by visitors.....	182
Fig. 28: Photography is prohibited.....	184
Fig. 29: The parting ritual.....	186
Fig. 30: Flowers and flags left by a marker in Dealey Plaza, Nov. 22, 2003.....	201

Chapter 1: "Everybody Sees Something That They Want to See:" Narrative, Conspiracy Theory, and Tourism

Many places have, in their local history, a violent crime that has become a nexus of legend with the passing of years. Dallas, Texas – where I was growing up throughout the 1980s – is no different, except that the most haunting event in our local history, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, became a nexus of legends that were not limited to local interest and circulation, but were circulated across the nation and throughout the world. Throughout my adolescence there, my family's out-of-town visitors would always want to be taken to see two particular sites. One, the Southfork Ranch, was famous for serving as the home of the fictional Ewing family on the then-current television series *Dallas*. The other was Dealey Plaza. A visit to the site of the Kennedy assassination was a ritual trip that would spark an exchange of site-specific stories – "That's the grassy knoll. People say they saw muzzle flash behind the fence there." The sense of mystery that a mythic name – The Grassy Knoll – could bestow on an ordinary highway embankment is one of the keenest memories I have of those times.

In 2000, Peter Knight observed that at "the turn of the millennium in America it seems that conspiracy theories are everywhere" (1). Arguing that conspiracy theory can no longer be dismissed or marginalized as irrelevant paranoia, Knight is

one of a number of scholars in fields such as American studies, cultural studies, and political science to make a serious attempt at understanding the social function of conspiracy theory. This work challenges established sociological and psychological schools of thought that marginalize and pathologize “cultural paranoia,” offering instead a far more subtle and productive picture of conspiracy theory as a necessary response to an increasingly complex, interconnected, and threatening world. But Knight's largely text-based approach (deconstructing the novels of Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed and Don DeLillo, for example), while producing fertile readings, leaves some intriguing gaps in his claim that conspiracy theory “has become part of the American vernacular” (2000:25). Or so it seems to me, who first encountered conspiracy theory in the more vernacular context of oral narrative. This project seeks to contribute to the recent body of work on conspiracy theory by both deepening the focus (to explore how conspiracy theory interacts with other practices of daily life, such as tourism) and narrowing it (to look at how conspiracy theory is activated in specific local contexts, rather than the broad, vaguely defined context of “American culture”).

In this project, I explore some of the ways in which stories function as part of everyday, lived experience. In particular, I focus on conspiracy narratives that play out in particular settings, the role of mainstream media in circulating these narratives amidst local and national publics, and how these narratives become part of the cultural life of a location and part of the experience of residents of and visitors to that location. Conspiracy theory will be examined as a particular genre of

narrative that became particularly omnipresent in the United States in the last decade of the twentieth century. While this ubiquity arguably leveled off around 1997 – the 50th anniversary of the crash of an unidentified flying object at Roswell, New Mexico, and also the year that the Fox network's series *The X-Files* peaked in the Nielsen ratings – popular culture's use of conspiracy theory as a trope is still a familiar phenomenon. Understanding conspiracy theory as "part of the American vernacular" of the past few decades necessitates understanding conspiracy theory as an interaction between texts and cultural practices, and fishing where these streams merge is an inexact business. The claims I hope to make are necessarily modest ones; it is not my intention to "explain" the phenomenon of conspiracy theory as a whole. But it is my hope that such a reading can enrich a cultural studies approach to analyzing some of the social functions that conspiracy theories are made to serve. I approach this problem through a social history of three sites – Dallas, Texas; Roswell, New Mexico; and Rachel, Nevada (a small town adjacent to a research facility popularly known as "Area 51") – which have developed tourist industries that market, as attractions, historical associations with conspiracy theory.

A second development in the late twentieth century, historically paralleling the growing prevalence of conspiracy theory narratives, is the increasing reliance of many locations on tourism as a way of reviving or reinventing the local economy. Conspiracy theory has in some cases become one of the ways in which a location can differentiate and define itself. Susan Fainstein and Dennis R. Judd write that tourism

...encompasses, first, the consumption of a complex array of tangible goods, including souvenirs, food and drink, rental cars and jets, plus physical facilities in the form of lodges, hotels, and convention centers. The industry also is made possible by and sustains a large number of occupations, such as waiter, reservations clerk, tour guide, and booking agent. Finally, tourists consume advertising and experience; in this sense travel involves desire and culture as much as it does products and services. (1999: 1-2)

Erve Chambers agrees that what defines modern tourism as such is an industry "dependent upon creating demand where it had not previously existed, and on re-creating tourist locales to match these new demands" (2000: 13). While I essentially agree with Fainstein and Judd that "Place marketing has added to the allure of tourism ... It is rarely self-evident that a location must be visited; thus some significance must be assigned to it that invests it with importance" (1999: 4), I would argue that marketing is one, but not the only, mediated source that now crucially articulates and shapes the significance that visitors seek in a particular location. I make this claim because one interesting aspect of all three sites discussed here is that "desire and culture" have preceded, and demanded the development of, the industry of products and services, as well as the marketing of such. The infamous Texas School Book Depository in Dallas drew visitors for decades before the city decided to add a museum and open the building to the public. The residents of Rachel, Nevada, a town with few amenities and scant "attractions," did not originate the idea of marketing their town's proximity to "Area 51" and its rumored top-secret

UFO research; rather, a steady influx of curious visitors to the Nevada desert prompted some residents to attempt to meet the demand for a tourist experience, such as Joe and Pat Travers, whose Rachel Bar and Grill was reborn in 1989 as the UFO-themed Little A'Le'Inn. A starting question for this study, then, is: What brings these visitors, and what are they looking for? By asking this question, I do not mean to reduce the local communities that tourists visit to “the passive recipients of a tourist dynamic,” as Erve Chambers cautions against (2000: ix). Rather, I would like to consider the ways in which media (including print media, film, television, and the Web) help popularize conspiracy theory through narrativizing it, in order to shed light on the ways in which these narratives shape the desires and experiences of visitors to relevant locations, affect their interactions with the host communities, and also affect how local residents understand and experience their own community. These narratives, I will argue, are negotiated; they both draw upon, and evolve in response to, the needs and desires of “hosts,” “guests,” and “mediators.”

Questions of Narrative

The following chapters focus on two interrelated questions: First, what sort of stories do popular media narratives tell about conspiracy theories and the places associated with them? And, what different readings are available in these texts to different audiences, and how do these readings correlate to the different experiences of tourists and residents in a depicted location? More specifically, how do

conflicting readings map onto struggles to define a site's identity amongst competing interests?

In *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske identifies two models that have dominated the study of popular culture. The "consensual model," which sees popular culture as a democratic equivalent to elite humanist culture, has "celebrated popular culture without situating it in a model of power" (1989: 20). The "mass culture" model, which could be exemplified by Horkheimer and Adorno's critiques of the culture industry, focuses on the dynamics of power, but tends to "emphasize so strongly the forces of domination as to make it appear impossible for a genuine popular culture to exist at all," as all forms of mass culture are viewed as imposed "upon a powerless and passive people" by commercial interests (1989: 20). Fiske then defines a third direction that he considers more productive:

Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make that ideology work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values. This approach sees popular culture as potentially, and often actually, progressive (though not radical), and it is essentially optimistic, for it finds in the vigor and vitality of the people evidence both of the possibility of social change and of the motivation to drive it (1989: 20-21).

Fiske argues that the polysemous nature of popular media texts allows them to be disarticulated from dominant ideology and rearticulated into what Fiske terms "counterknowledges":

Counterknowledge must be socially and politically motivated: recovering repressed information, disarticulating and rearticulating events, and producing a comprehensive and coherent counterknowledge involves hard labor, and hard labor always requires strong motivation . . . the politics of a counterknowledge are not confined to the immediate social conditions of its production and circulation: when circulated more widely in society, counterknowledge can provide a deconstructive jolt to what Foucault calls 'official knowledge,' and thus question the means by which that status is maintained (1996: 192).

The discourses that Fiske is calling “counterknowledges” include discourses that are commonly labeled “conspiracy theories,” a term that Fiske declines to use because of its dismissive connotations. He recognizes that labeling a discourse as a “conspiracy theory” can function as one of a body of discursive techniques that invites “readers to distance themselves from this belief and from those who hold it” (Fiske, 1996: 211); a strategy for “identifying the foreignness of the discourse” and placing it in metaphorical “quotation marks” (Fiske, 1996: 213).

This model of counterknowledge, and its application to understanding popular culture, is the one to which I hope to contribute, through examining the competing narratives of tourism promoters, residents, and visitors that shape their experiences of a particular location. My argument is that, while popular media narratives do shape inhabitants’ and visitors’ experiences of a location, inhabitants and visitors also have their own stories that can differ from the popular ones in significant ways. This question will be addressed through the use of published accounts from newspapers and journals; materials promoting tourism in the chosen

locations; oral accounts gained by talking to tourism promoters, residents, and visitors; and my own knowledge and experiences as a former resident of Dallas and as a visitor to all of these sites.

Oral communication is an important mode of transmission in conspiracy theory, and this project pays close attention to stories that conspiracy tourists and tourism promoters have told in their own words. Some may question whether conspiracy theories represent an "oral tradition." Many studies of folklore emphasize a purity of oral transmission. Daniel Patterson, for example, contrasts his subject Bobby McMillon, who learned stories and songs through listening to local and family connections, with other "folk" performers who learned their songs "from books and recordings" (2000: 2), implying that the latter are less valuable sources. This of course reflects one of the original mandates of folklore as an academic field of study, to record and preserve traditions being displaced by modernity. From a cultural studies perspective, however, modern interactions between media and oral culture are a worthy object of study in themselves. For example, responding to a survey conducted by Lauren Zimmerman in the spring of 2003 at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill¹, 20-year-old Jaclyn offers, "I heard about the JFK theory in my movie criticism class last semester while studying Oliver Stone. We watched a clip of *JFK* with Donald Sutherland and Kevin Costner. Some people in the class, especially these two guys, got off on a discussion about the conspiracy." Thus the

¹ This survey, which asked students about conspiracy theories regarding the JFK assassination, was conducted for a graduate seminar. Both paper questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were employed. Though the results were not published, Lauren shared the replies she received with me, and I have quoted several of the interviews here as examples of oral communication of conspiracy theory.

film, in addition to conveying its own variation of a JFK conspiracy theory, sparked a storytelling session in which oral variations were also exchanged.

Gillian Bennett suggests that in the collection of folk legend, “It is unusual good fortune, of course, to find narrators so willing to commit themselves as to say ‘this is absolutely true’ or ‘that’s nonsense’” (1996: 19). The question of belief is so central to conspiracy theory, however, that tellers show a strong inclination to explicitly articulate a position of belief or disbelief. Bennett observes that “No one, not even performers themselves, can always say for certain whether a given narrative is *believed to be* true, but we can at least try to work out how it sounds to an audience if it is ‘*told as true*’ and what it *means* for a story to be ‘told as true’” (1996: 17). According to her observations, a story “told for true” has more details and a greater degree of specificity, and also more closely follows a cumulative narrative structure, while a story “told for laughs” gets right to the climax (25). Specificity, however, does not seem to be a consistent index of the degree to which a conspiracy theory is “told for true.” This is especially so for theories related to the Kennedy assassination, which have accrued a great deal of detail and gained a high degree of cultural penetration over the past four decades, as exhibited by Lauren Zimmerman’s 2003 redaction of Kenneth’s detailed, but skeptical, account:

I don't know...I could talk about the second gunman. I've always found that that was kind of ludicrous because you have to understand the timing involved in this. It's a lot easier for a sniper to just work by themselves, that's why they are snipers. Actual military uses [teams?]. They have a spotter, a shooter, and a couple security

people. Obviously, that would imply a large amount of, ...um...planning, a conspiracy, as you can say. However, when you look at it that way, why would you need a second gunman? All of the people that you have, your conspiracy, would be in the same book depository room on the sixth floor because your security would be outside the room, your spotter would be inside the room with the sniper, i.e. Oswald.

Okay, now, you've got a limited exposed area and you have a basic inability, I mean you don't have the kind of communications now, then, that you do now. You know, cell phones. Okay, call up somebody on your cell phone and say Kennedy just passed checkpoint A and thus alerting your two snipers, okay. So you have to have two people that are able to read each other's minds in order to hit the same target moving at the same speed from two different places at the same time because the amount of time that he is going to be in this square is going to be a matter of maybe 20, 30 seconds.

So, for a various set of reasons, I think that the second gunman is...stupid. However, there are people who testify seeing somebody holding a rifle behind a hedge on top of the grassy knoll. What was he doing there? Is it a case of mass hallucination, everybody sees something that they want to see...let's start all over again, I've completely lost my train of thought.

So, anyway, you have a second gunman who doesn't shoot...see, what I said first, you know, was the hypothesis of the second gunman shooting. Okay, so you have a second gunman who doesn't shoot, so that means that Oswald is a [patsy?] and you've got a backup. So, take Oswald who is a marginal character to begin with, and so you say, okay, I want to hedge my bet. I want Kennedy dead, but I don't really think that Oswald is going to be the person to pull it off, because, you know, he is kind of a shaky character. You don't know whether his [unintelligible] are going to stand up, whether he's actually going to take the shot...

Okay, so you got a conspiracy of people who have a backup gunner on the grassy knoll. Me personally, I think that it's just probably some poor schmuck who's walking along, OH! Kennedy's going through the square today, let's see Kennedy. So, he's standing behind the hedge and, Oh Damn! Somebody just got shot, cool! But people see people behind the hedge, okay...He's got to be there for some Machiavellian reason. So...okay, he's there to back up the real shooter, Oswald. And these are the guys, the guy on the grassy knoll was the guy who hired Ruby to assassinate Oswald knowing that Ruby's going to get killed in his attempt, you see how twisted these things get? Self, self-perpetuating. People can always find different ways of explaining various mundane things.

Let's see, where was I? Oh, the shooter. SO he actually doesn't have to fire because he sees that Kennedy gets shot. So, he just stays in the background and goes about merrily arranging for Oswald's assassination the next day. Where he hires Jack Ruby, an ardent Kennedy fan, to kill Oswald. Although, who would be hired to go walk in the middle of someplace that he knows that he's going to get killed. Another thought. [5 second pause] I think we should end this interview now.

Kenneth's narrative demonstrates how conspiracy theory can complicate the practice of telling a story "for true" by introducing an element of epistemological uncertainty; the details of each aspect of the story are tangentially examined for possible alternate meanings. In fact, the narrative seems to be constantly stalled by an overabundance of detail; the JFK "conspiracy myth" seems to have grown so intricate and multifaceted that a straightforward telling of a particular "conspiracy theory" is continuously threatened by numerous false starts, asides and tangents.

Narratives of conspiracy theories tend toward intertextuality due to a frequently prominent concern with evidence. The Zapruder film, for example, is a

common reference point when discussing the JFK assassination. Interestingly, the same features of the film are sometimes cited to prove very different points. For example, in his interview with Zimmerman, Kenneth further argues that

A lot of people like to point to the film that everybody has seen and say when Kennedy gets shot, he jerks one way and then when the governor, lieutenant governor of Texas who is also shot at the same time jerks another way. And then, okay, now you got two different people shooting, then you have the misses, there were two misses and then you say okay, well, you know, you got one person shooting at the car from one angle, one person shooting at the car from another angle, one person hits Kennedy, one person hits the lieutenant governor, both of them may have missed, both of them may have...et cetera, et cetera. But people really don't understand physics. You see Kennedy jerking, but you also have to remember that he just took an impact to the back of his head, driving him forward in the direction of his movement.

In this case, the visual evidence of the Zapruder film is treated as an easily accessible text with a stable, coherent meaning, described in order to first offer a "common" interpretation of what it depicts and then counter with his own, more knowledgeable interpretation. This concern with practices of evidence-gathering and deduction illustrates the impetus to democratize the practice of science and the status of "expert" that frequently undergirds conspiracy discourse and, as I will return to in later chapters, becomes even more explicit in the amateur science of "ufology." However, it also foregrounds the difficulty of extrapolating, even from the most empirical evidence, a "truth" that can be recognized as such from a

multitude of interpretive contexts. Another of Zimmerman's respondents, Ellen, not only interprets the evidence of the film differently, but cites it in a different manner:

After going through the funeral, everyone was, of course, glued to the television, during all the proceedings and the funeral, and it was just really ama/ It was just so moving and so incredibly awful, I mean, it is just hard to describe how that was, but as time went on and things came to light about his life and about things that could have been, and all the tapes that were made and shown of the assassination, and things that were shown on TV, it was pretty obvious to me, and probably to a lot of people, there was more to just one person up in some building with one rifle, that was not an automatic rifle to begin with. That could shoot this man, and kill him from that depth, from that distance. I can't remember the name of the guy who got the film...

Zapruder, that shows, I mean that was so incredible. It shows the puffs of gunfire smoke, you know...what do they call it, the burn, where the guys were supposedly, someone was supposedly hidden behind...The grassy knoll. And, but it really made sense, when I saw that film, the documentary about that, I mean, it was really so obvious that there could be more to it than we the public knew.

Ellen's description also assigns an "obvious" meaning to the film (in this case, directly counter to the intrinsic meaning described by Kenneth), but her account places the film within a narrative of the lived experience of gradually learning about the assassination during and after the initial shock of its occurrence. Her description endows the film with visuals (such as gun smoke on the grassy knoll) that were attributed to it by word-of-mouth during the years in which the film was not available for public viewing.

Conspiracy Theory: A Critical Approach

Skip Willman suggests that what he labels “contingency theory,” a model of history based upon chance and randomness, “represents a new and widespread ‘strategy of containment’ in the effort to dispel the ‘paranoid’ fears raised by conspiracy theory” (2002: 22), but I think it can be understood as more than that. As an example of contingency theory, Willman cites a review of Don DeLillo’s Kennedy assassination novel *Libra* by George Will, in which Will says: “It takes a steady adult nerve to stare unblinkingly at the fact that history can be jarred sideways by an act that signifies nothing but an addled individual’s inner turmoil.” (24). While Will suggests that it is conspiracy theorists who are taking a simplistic or reductive view of history, Willman points out that “Contingency theory salvages the American status quo by turning a blind eye to the social relations underlying ‘large events’ and spinning these often traumatic moments as the product of ‘addled individuals’” (25). This conflict, Willman suggests, reflects a deeper “apparent antimony” between a universe “in which mysterious forces manipulate history” and one which is “driven by contingency” (25). This deep, structural opposition can operate at diverse levels of culture, from popular rumor to the most rigorous academic discourse. One of the radical dimensions of Marx was his banishment, after Hegel, of contingency from history; Marx’s history is indeed one driven by “mysterious forces” which he sought to theorize.

In the United States, the second half of the twentieth century was marked by the appearance and dissemination, within popular culture, of several overlapping, historically specific bodies of conspiracy theory that place the United States federal government or some subsection of it in the role of conspirator. It is surely not coincidental that this same period saw the expansion of what Susan Buck-Morss calls the “wild zone” of government power:

From the perspective of the end of the twentieth century, the paradox seems irrefutable that political regimes claiming to rule in the name of the masses – claiming, that is, to be radically democratic – construct, *legitimately*, a terrain in which the exercise of power is out of control of the masses, veiled from public scrutiny, arbitrary and absolute. Modern sovereignties harbor a blind spot, a zone in which power is above the law and thus, at least potentially, a terrain of terror.

This wild zone of power, by its very structure impossible to domesticate, is intrinsic to mass-democratic regimes. It makes no difference whether the model of their legitimacy is the liberal claim of political (formal) democracy based on universal, mass suffrage, or the socialist claim of economic (substantive) democracy based on the egalitarian distribution of social goods. Either way, as regimes of supreme, sovereign power, they are always, already *more* than a democracy – and consequently a good deal less (2002: 2-3).

In contrast to the “civil state,” the public face of governmental authority that is accountable to the governed, the “wild zone” is home to the covert power wielded by intelligence agencies, the military industrial complex, and other manifestations of the national security state. Arguing that “it is the real possibility of war and the threat of a common enemy that constitute the state not merely as a legal entity but as

a sovereign entity,” (2002: 8) Buck-Morss identifies the origin of the national security state in the logic of the Cold War; the anticommunist mandate of the U.S. National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, both established in 1947, “justified the secret use of violence against threats to national security secretly defined, violating every democratic right in the name of protecting democracy” (21). Two journalists, David Wise and Thomas Ross, coined the term “invisible government” to describe this wild zone in their 1964 expose of the CIA, a term that in the next decade would evolve into an emblematic term of the conspiracy theory lexicon: the “shadow government.”

Following exposés such as Wise and Ross’s, the American public was shocked into greater awareness of the reality and extent of these violations by a series of revelations in the 1970s, including the Watergate scandal and the Church Committee’s 1975 investigations of civil rights abuses by the CIA and the FBI². Peter Knight identifies this historical moment as a crucible in which new manifestations and attitudes toward conspiracy theory were formed in American culture. “Since the revelations during the mid-1970s in the wake of Watergate about the conspiratorial activities of government agencies,” he writes, “a priori dismissals of conspiracy theory have become less tenable for many Americans” (2000: 10). One of the cultural functions of conspiracy theory, this would suggest, is to articulate a troubling gap between the ideals of American democracy and this difficult-to-ignore

² Officially known as the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, the Church Committee, chaired by Democratic Senator Frank Church, investigated a wide range of abuses by intelligence agencies, from opening mail to attempted assassinations of foreign leaders.

lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the American government in practice.

The late 1980s and 1990s saw a popularization of both conspiracy theories and “conspiracy theory,” a term that has come to refer reflexively to a self-conscious positioning, an “ironic stance toward knowledge and the possibility of truth, operating within the rhetorical terrain of the double negative” (Knight, 2000, 2). This popular “paranoia” has been paralleled by the seeming ubiquity of actual conspiracy – the use of secrecy and manipulation to achieve policy objectives, considered traumatically disillusioning at the time of the Watergate scandal, has become routinized through “Iran-Contra-gate” and other subsequent “____gates” since then. As it becomes more plausible, however, the cultural logic of paranoia also becomes more diffuse, less contained, “not so much an occasional outburst of countersubversive invective as part and parcel of many people’s normal way of thinking about who they are and how the world works” (Knight, 2000, 2).

Fredric Jameson writes that conspiracy theory “must be seen as a degraded attempt –through the figuration of advanced technology – to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system” (1991: 38); it is the “poor person’s cognitive mapping” (1988: 356). “Cognitive mapping” is an attempt to “span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations...the gap between the local positioning of the subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated” (1988: 353). Jameson further claims that:

In the widespread paralysis of the collective or social imaginary, to which 'nothing occurs' (Karl Krauss) when confronted with the ambitious program of fantasizing an economic system on the scale of the globe itself, the older motif of conspiracy knows a fresh lease on life, as a narrative structure capable of reuniting the minimal basic components: a potentially infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility; or in other words, the collective and the epistemological (1992: 9).

The need for an impoverished cognitive mapping, he argues, the failure of the collective imaginary, is a reflection of both the vastness of the system and its complexity, as previously separate entities such as businesses and government become increasingly intertwined and alike in their "concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality" (1992: 3). Although one should undoubtedly be wary of unproblematically equating the cognitive process of the subject situating itself in ideology with the physical process of locating oneself geographically, the "map" is a compelling metaphor when Jameson applies it to conspiracy theory, given the conspiracy theorist's frequent use of a chart or graph to represent an interconnected web or tree of seemingly unrelated agents and information, as seen in this display from the Conspiracy Museum in Dallas, which positions the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and other significant events as the branches of a single tree:



Fig. 1: *The Conspiracy Tree* (photo 2001 by Shelley McGinnis)

Peter Knight writes that:

in recent years the extension of surveillance has come about not through the apocalyptic achievement of Orwellian state control, but through seemingly benign corporate processes such as the gathering of consumer profiles via credit card purchases, website visits, workplace monitoring supposedly for the employees' own safety, and so on. In the 'era of the massive codification and storage of data,' Don DeLillo suggests, 'we are all keepers and yielders of secrets' (2000: 35).

Jameson concludes that conspiracy theory represents the "poor person's" cognitive mapping because it is "a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its

slippage into sheer theme and content” (1988: 356). This slippage reflects the commodification of conspiracy theory that made it highly exploitable by popular media. Knight suggests that “many people today engage with conspiracy theories in an eclectic and often contradictory manner, as part entertainment, part speculation, and part accusation, without necessarily being a signed-up member of a militia or political movement” (2000: 44).

Robert Markley considers the most serious implications of this mainstreaming to lie in the manner in which conspiracy theory, while ostensibly offering a self-contained, coherent narrative, tends to undermine the very possibility of coherence:

Paranoia, in practice, becomes difficult to distinguish from “normal” processes of forging logical connections among disparate phenomena or observations, or, more simply, negotiating one’s way through daily existence...we want to believe in the coherence of the world and in the explanatory power of human intellect, but our efforts to render the world coherent are constantly threatening to slip from order into tyranny; and to resist this encroaching tyranny, a tyranny in which we are always complicit, we must unmask and deny the coercive processes of forging meaning (1999: 78-79).

Also at stake is the possibility of consensus; as Jodi Dean notes, the endless proliferation of conspiracy theories challenges “the presumption that there is some ‘public’ that share a notion of reality, a concept of reason, and a set of criteria by which claims to reason and rationality are judged” (1998: 11).

The fear of conspiracies, and indeed actual conspiracies, has been part of human history from its earliest records. An argument can be made, however, that “conspiracy theory” is a modern phenomenon traceable in its earliest manifestations to the discourses of conspiracies of witches, Freemasons, and Illuminati that circulated widely in Europe during the early modern period (15th and 16th centuries). “Conspiracy theory” reifies the concept of secrecy, rendering the secret a commodified form of knowledge available only to the initiated, usually along three vectors: secret associations and connections between the conspirators; secret access to or control over positions of power; and finally, a secret plan with consequences that will affect non-conspirators, usually on a grand scale. This basic model of conspiracy theory has repeatedly surfaced in Europe and America over the six centuries of modern history, with Jews, Jesuits, Rosicrucians, anarchists, synarchists, communists, and many others variously occupying the role of the conspirators.³

G.T. Cubitt argues that some conspiracy theories represent “myths” that have constituted a frequently recurring and often influential feature of political culture in both Europe and America for centuries. Cubitt defines a “myth” as “a story which people take to be true, and which they use as the key to an understanding of the way things are or happen” (1989: 13). A “conspiracy myth,” then, “tells the supposedly true and supposedly historical story of a conspiracy and of the events and disastrous

³ See, for example, the representation of witchcraft in Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) as a widespread Satanic conspiracy; John Robison's claims of clandestine activities by Illuminati and Freemasons in *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797); and *The International Jew*, an anti-Semitic booklet published by Henry Ford in 1920 that alleges the existence of a Jewish “World Program.”

effects to which it has given rise" (1989: 13). A conspiracy myth is distinguished from a conspiracy theory in that the latter represents an act of interpretation in which specific, particular events are integrated and assimilated into a pre-existing conspiracy myth.

While "conspiracy theory" has become a highly visible feature of the American cultural landscape, individual conspiracy theories are often short-lived phenomena. Only a few acquire the status of "conspiracy myth." The JFK assassination, the Roswell crash, and the "secret" base at Area 51 all have the mythological depth, complexity, and endurance that allow them to be frequently reiterated in popular media narratives, to promise a return on investment to locals wanting to develop a tourism industry, and to attract visitors on a steady basis and notable scale. Ken Hillis has suggested to me – and I agree – that there is a perceptible hierarchy at work in the locations explored in this project, with Dealey Plaza being the most familiar and recognizable to many people, followed by Roswell, while "Area 51," though most people have heard the name, remains more of a "gray area." Images of Dealey Plaza obtained their deep and intense familiarity through the unprecedented media coverage accorded the JFK assassination, and that undoubtedly contributes to the iconic status this Dallas intersection ambivalently enjoys as the "number one" conspiracy tourism destination in the United States. But I would also attribute this to the JFK assassination's equally unchallenged status as the most archetypal and fundamental nexus of conspiracy theory in the United States. And this in turn is due in part to its extreme flexibility and adaptability as

“myth,” exemplified by the varied cast of “villains” most frequently evoked (the CIA, the KGB, the Mafia, Fidel Castro, Lyndon Johnson).

Questions of Tourism

Tourism has come to occupy a major place in the economies of many localities throughout the world. As Fainstein and Judd phrase it,

Within the United States and Western Europe, the century-long decline in agricultural employment and the more recent and sometimes sudden loss of industrial jobs have forced cities and towns into a desperate struggle for survival. Because tourism is an industry with few barriers to entry and the potential for large returns to investment, even the most unlikely of places are tempted to turn themselves into tourist magnets (1999: 2).

Its increasing popularity as a strategy, however, also makes tourism an increasingly competitive industry. This competition for tourists has important social and cultural implications, as it intensifies the transformation of inhabited places into destinations for other people to visit. A place that was once organized primarily around meeting the needs of local interests becomes reconceived and reorganized in ways intended to serve the desires of outsiders. The interests of local inhabitants and visitors may be more consistently compatible in some instances than in others.

Transformations of this type are inherently bound up with uses of power and representation. In this sense, Erve Chambers suggests, “tourism has the capacity to strike at the heart of human identity” (2000: 31). The representation of a place as a destination includes a redefinition; destinations need to have a special character in

order to differentiate themselves from competing destinations. Tourism thus becomes a site where local interests contest how they (their community) should be represented to the rest of the world, and gives rise to situations where different segments of a community compete amongst themselves for the power and authority to determine how a place and its residents will be represented, to attempt to imbue a site with identities that best represent their interests. This process may even have the potential to ultimately effect how people and communities think about themselves.

Dean MacCannell describes tourists as seeking to escape their alienated lives by finding “authenticity” somewhere else as “a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience” (1999: 13). While “the rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see: this is a *typical* native house; this is the *very* place the leader fell” (14) and the “variety of understanding held out before tourists as an ideal is an *authentic* and *demystified* experience” (94), many tourist sites operate according to a principle of “staged authenticity” (103). MacCannell draws on Erving Goffman’s model of front-stage and back-stage performance (first described in Goffman’s pivotal 1956 work *Performance in Everyday Life*) to clarify this point; tourist sites deliver authenticity by performing some aspect of “back-stage” revelation, as “back regions are still the places where it is popularly believed that secrets are” (93).

MacCannell's location of difference in terms of "authenticity" is useful to this study because, while a great deal of literature on tourism focuses on "exotic" tourism to faraway locations, opening tourism to postcolonialist critiques, MacCannell's model opens up the study of tourism to the huge field of domestic tourism, where the relationship between "hosts" and "guests" is more difficult to characterize:

For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles...the concern of moderns for "naturalness," their nostalgia and their search for authenticity are not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed cultures and dead epochs. They are also components of the conquering spirit of modernity – the grounds of its unifying consciousness (1999: 3).

The sought-for authenticity can even be the experience of trauma: "Sightseeing, rather than suppressing these things from consciousness, brings them to our consciousness, 'as if' we might assimilate them" (1999: xx). Here MacCannell comments upon a potentially regressive aspect of tourism; unpalatable truths about American history or society become transformed into objects of consumption, and their potentially disruptive significance thus contained. The JFK assassination, I would suggest, is transformed by the Sixth Floor Museum into an "experience" bounded by the texts of the museum. The "experiential" emphasis of recent museums, such as Dallas's Sixth Floor Museum, markets an emotional experience under the rubric of catharsis. This equation of travel with a quality of emotional

experience is identified by many scholars as a key aspect of the concept of “pilgrimage.” While the term emerged in the Middle Ages to refer to institutionalized travel to sites sanctified by the Church, Ian Reader notes that “the word ‘pilgrimage’ itself is widely used in broad and often secular contexts,” and argues that “the popularization and apparent secularization of the notion of pilgrimage in these terms is ... valid” (1993: 221). He defines a pilgrimage as “the ‘going out and coming back’ initiated by an emotional response to an assassination, miracle, apparition or tragedy that transcends the ordinary patterns for life, or through the simple wish to step outside the normal flow of life” (220).

MacCannell also introduces the useful term “marker involvement” to describe the activation of tourist sites by visitors, who bring certain interpretive frameworks with them to create the meaning of a site: “Usually, the first contact a sightseer has with a sight is not the sight itself but with some representation thereof” (1999: 110). He uses the term marker to mean information about a specific sight, which is often provided in the form of literal on-site markers provided by hosts to “teach” visitors how to experience the site. MacCannell gives the example of winter visitors to an outdoor zoo who tour the empty cages, reading the descriptions of the absent animals, and thus “experience” the zoo.

Anthropology and ethnography are the fields that have produced the most enduring studies of tourism, and an ethnographic approach can, as Fainstein and Judd argue, serve to bring out the “variation in the impacts of tourism and its multiple meanings” (1999: 16), allowing for the study of “global forces” on a

“human scale” (17). Chambers identifies several pitfalls that often beset ethnographers, however. Critiques of tourism tend to treat it as a manifestation of a perceived power imbalance between tourists and local residents, and to treat the tourist as “the principle dynamic in tourists experiences,” at the expense of understanding how residents participate in a cultural economy of tourism, as well as how tourism is “mediated by persons and institutions who are neither hosts nor guests” (2000: ix). Another limitation frequently encountered in such case studies, as Chambers notes, is to “write in the ‘ethnographic present’ ...there is a dearth of longitudinal studies that could help us understand how tourism processes operate over the long run” (viii). The need for an equilibrium between the synchronic and diachronic is part of the methodological mandate of social history as defined by Mary Beth Haralovich, who argues that “the detailed ‘microhistory’ necessary for understanding everyday life must also be integrated into the greater dynamics of social processes” (1986: 6). Thus the methodology I employ in this project is an interdisciplinary one: drawing upon both ethnography and social history.

Haralovich calls for periodization which “assumes a ‘world in formation’ wherein certain ‘events’ (which have their own histories) ... are brought together” (13). A social history of media, then, should consider how a text “participates in the production and distribution of social knowledge, in the process of meaning production” (5) by interacting with other factors. This model of social history involves discursive analysis, understanding discourse to include the social position from which it originates. As Fiske puts it:

Discourse is language in social use; language accented with its history of domination, subordination, and resistance; language marked by the social conditions of its use and its users; it is politicized, power-bearing language employed to extend or defend the interests of its discursive community (1996: 3).

Social history is also highly applicable to the study of tourism. Historian Dona Brown argues that tourism, like the mass media, “played a key role in creating a consumer oriented society and economy” (1995: 9). Both industries grew dramatically in the late 19th and the 20th centuries with the aid of new technologies, the articulated and, possibly perceived, effect of which was to make the world “smaller.” Pierre Lévy observes that: “The acceleration of communication is contemporaneous with an enormous growth in physical mobility. Both are part of the *same* wave of virtualization” (1997: 32). The two industries, which show so many parallels, achieve a synergistic and profitable intersection in “armchair tourism.” Lucy Lippard notes that a “booming business of guidebooks and tourist literature ... began around 1820 in the United States” (1988: 4). Tourist literature, and its descendents in travelogue films and television, have furthered the commodification of an old Western tradition of mediated “travel” via the imagination, and George Ritzer and Allen Liska propose that the internet offers a culmination of this process by promising stay-at-home tourists a form of “cyber-travel” free of cost, discomfort and inconvenience. For examples of the latter, see the proliferation of web cams that allow a browser to see “notable” locations in real time, or the Street View feature of

Google Maps that offers a 360 degree panoramic eye-level view of many sites in the US, Europe, and the Pacific Rim.

However, this form of travel is not positioned simply as a replacement for or precursor to the “real thing”; to borrow terms from Lévy, armchair tourism may be understood as a form of “virtual” travel whose relationship to the “actual” is of “Two different ways of being” (1997: 25). To shift theoretical models, the mediated tourist experience may be seen as a reproduction which does not, pace Benjamin, efface the aura of the original, but rather feeds upon and fortifies it, even if this process is so culturally embedded that, in specific cases, it can be brought into play around an original marked by absence. Fainstein and Judd argue that

The thickening of linkages among people around the world through shared publications, the Internet, immigration, the prevalence of English as a second language, and a common discourse around interests that transcend local, and even national, boundaries has intensified, rather than diminished, the desire for face-to-face contact (1999: 4).

As illustrated by Lucy Lippard’s observation of the desire of travelers to Maine to visit Bar Harbor, L.L. Bean, and television’s Cabot Cove (1988: 8), destinations that become objects of desire for tourists can include those that are “famous for being famous,” as well as places that have never existed. These observations are worth bearing in mind when looking at a location such as “Area 51,” which occupies both a concrete location as a restricted air base in the Nevada Desert and an extensive

imaginary space in popular fiction and legend. I'll conclude by saying a little about the individual research points I have developed for each chapter.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 looks at Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, the site of the JFK assassination. It offers some background history on the city, the Dealey Plaza landmark, and the 1963 assassination, as well as the history of Dallas's subsequent representation as the "City of Hate." I look at the subsequent history of the Dealey Plaza site, arguing that this history reflects shame and ambivalence regarding the assassination on the part of municipal leaders. This highly charged context inflects my reading of the development in the 1980s and 90s of a museum and historical landmark on the site, a history that I have reconstructed from articles published in local periodicals and sources from the museum's archives. I also look at the museum itself, arguing that its displays represent a carefully negotiated response to the assassination that is meant to speak for the "public" of Dallas, and that discursive elements of the assassination that are excluded, contained or downplayed in the Sixth Floor exhibit, the central, "official" local purveyor of assassination interpretation, tend to reemerge in the context of an unofficial, more blatantly commercial, assassination tourism industry.

The thin line between capitalization and commemoration became very evident in 1991, when Oliver Stone applied for permission to use the Depository building in the key assassination sequence in his conspiracy-themed film *JFK*.

Stone's reenactment of the assassination for his film compelled an unprecedented amount of metacritical dialogue in the local press concerning the assassination and the city's response to it. It also closely connected sustained public interest in the assassination with pervasive doubts concerning the official account of how it happened. The year of the film's release also saw the first of an annual series of conferences in Dallas for "assassination researchers." This "assassination community" has been instrumental in every subsequent year in organizing an annual commemoration of the assassination in Dallas, culminating in the 40th anniversary observation in 2003. This chapter concludes with an account of that event, looking at it as an intersection of multiple communities.

Chapter 3 looks at Roswell, New Mexico, the purported site of a UFO crash. In July of 1947, the U.S. Army reported having recovered the remains of a crashed "flying saucer" on a ranch north of Roswell. This claim, quickly retracted, is examined in this chapter within the context of a rash of "flying saucer" sightings across the U.S. in the late 1940s, and the subsequent marginalization of UFO research as a "crackpot" pursuit within dominant culture, even as it continued to flourish as the self-contained and often self-referential subculture of "ufology." I also explore the "rediscovery" of the Roswell story in the late 1970s in a spate of books aimed at the segment of the popular market interested in UFOs.

Efforts to promote UFO-themed tourism in Roswell have been enthusiastically taken up by the Roswell Chamber of Commerce and by local politicians – since 1991, the Mayor's office has officially dedicated some part of July

to the commemoration of the "Roswell Incident," a series of local festivals that I have researched through the archives of the *Roswell Daily Record* and by participation in July 2004. These efforts have borrowed the postmodern strategy of "having it both ways" in their promotion of the town to tourists interested in aliens or conspiracies. Roswell's efforts to build tourism have been, on a modest scale, remarkably effective: the town of 50,000 people receives an estimated 90,000 visitors a year. I argue that tourism in Roswell is sustainable in part because of the extent to which it is a local endeavor that involves and engages many residents.

Chapter 4 looks at Rachel, Nevada, a town located near "Area 51," and the surrounding region. "Area 51" is the popular name applied to a high-security facility, located about 90 miles north of Las Vegas, that is allegedly used for testing experiment aircraft. Since the 1980s, the facility and surrounding area have also been the focus of an increasingly intricate and intertextual mythology of UFOs and conspiracy theory. In 1995, Nevada State Assemblyman Roy Neighbors introduced a bill to designate State Route 375, the lonely stretch of highway that passes north of the site through the tiny town of Rachel, NV, "The Extraterrestrial Alien Highway," and Governor Bob Miller flew to Los Angeles to negotiate an agreement with 20th Century Fox to jointly market the "E.T. Highway" and Fox's forthcoming science fiction movie *Independence Day*.

"Area 51" would not seem to be a conventional site for leisure tourism. Located in a remote stretch of Nevada desert, the base itself and all surrounding land are completely inaccessible to visitors. The closest town, Rachel, consists of a scattering

of mostly mobile homes and a bar and grill establishment. In short, there is little to actually see or do here, by the standards of consumer recreation.

The role of media narratives in constructing the experience of a location becomes exaggerated in the case of "Area 51," a site that can be approached but not actually visited. The influx of tourists to the Rachel area began in the late 1980s, although "Area 51" did not begin receiving much attention from print media, television or film until the mid-1990s. Far and away the chief medium for circulating information about Area 51 has been the Internet. UFOs and conspiracy theories were part of the Internet from its earliest days as a public medium, through such virtual-community forms as dialup bulletin boards and UseNet groups such as alt.conspiracy, ParaNet, and MufoNet. From these early dialup bulletin boards and Usenet groups, Area 51 has developed a substantial presence on the World Wide Web through an extensive network of Web sites and pages devoted to it.

Finally, the concluding chapter takes a step back to examine how the "conspiracy mythologies" invoked by the sites explored here blur together, overlap and reinforce each other. I also revisit some of the revelations that recur throughout this work – comparing and contrasting the ways in which locations manage the perceived stigma of conspiracy theory in order to integrate it into their self-representation in a manner that serves perceived needs of both locals and visitors, and how these strategies work with or against the actual, expressed needs and desires of visitors, such as investigation, congregation and pilgrimage.

Chapter 2: “A Sad Corner of Dallas, a Small Part of America that Belongs to Everyone:” JFK Assassination Tourism in Dealey Plaza

The most popular tourist site in the city of Dallas is a seven story building overlooking Dealey Plaza from the northwest corner of Houston and Elm – a brick structure built in 1901 to house a farm equipment supplier, which spent 40 years as the main warehouse for the Texas School Book Depository and currently serves as the Dallas County Administration Building. In 1992 alone, two million people trekked to the gentrified West End district to view the modest exterior, while half a million paid a \$6 admission fee to tour the sixth floor (Barber). By the east door, a small plaque courtesy of the National Historic Landmarks Program explains that it was here that “Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly shot and killed President John F. Kennedy from a sixth-floor window as the presidential motorcade passed this site.” The word “allegedly” has been underscored by countless keys and pocket knives.

Oswald's guilt is necessarily “alleged,” for he did not live to see his day in court. By placing an emphasis on the word that was not part of the original plaque, these anonymous critics have transformed it from a routine disclaimer to a much more pointed questioning of the official account of Kennedy's death. This small example of visitors “talking back” to the site's official commemorators illustrates an interesting dimension of tourism that the Kennedy assassination site in Dallas brings

to the foreground. While tourism is often understood, and critiqued, as a passive consumption of commercially-packaged attractions, tourists in Dealey Plaza often seem to desire a more active, participatory form of engagement with the location and its interpretations. In the face of the city's attempts to maintain strict control of the site and authority over its cultural significance, many visitors view the site, like the assassination itself, as a public object that demands critical debate and analysis.



Fig. 2: *The Depository as seen from Dealey Plaza (photo 2001 by Shelley McGinnis)*

Jurgen Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, defines the "bourgeois public sphere" as a set of institutions, originating in Europe of the late 17th century, that produced a radical new model of political power based on the

critical use of reason – a discourse that could be seen as outside, and independent of, governmental and economic control, and therefore exert a regulating power over both. The public sphere, Habermas argues, paved the way for the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, and is crucial to the functioning of democracy in the modern nation-state. When Habermas describes the public sphere as a "space" of free discussion, he is of course using "space" in a metaphorical sense; that the structural transformation he describes began with the spread of literacy confirms that the modern public sphere has always been a mediated sphere. But I wish to suggest that sites of civic memory can function as literal spaces where mediated debates can "touch ground." A site such as Dealey Plaza addresses its visitors as citizens; the event that it marks, and that marked it – the highly-mediated, violent death of a highly-mediated, controversial president – taps deep reservoirs of civic feeling. And so, in this role as citizen, many tourists come not only to see but to speak, and question.

This democratic impulse to speak out and ask questions is one of the most striking aspects of conspiracy tourism, and nowhere is it more evident, and enduring, than amongst visitors to the site of the JFK assassination. Later in this chapter I take a closer look at this phenomenon, examining the sometimes spontaneous, sometimes carefully-managed use of Dealey Plaza as a "public sphere" to discuss both personal and political ramifications of the assassination, as well as the role of conspiracy theory in the construction of what Michael Warner (2002) terms a "counterpublic" that links assassination theories to the application of

democratic ideals in both government and knowledge production. But first I think it is important to establish a historical and cultural context in which to consider how this discussion is activated within this particular site. First, I want to explore the evocative familiarity of Dealey Plaza to many visitors, which I partially attribute to the images produced by the media landscape of the 1960s – the ubiquitous network television coverage immediately following the assassination on one hand, and on the other, the repetitive, iconic cultural presence of the 16mm amateur “Zapruder” film. Understanding how the site has been managed by the city, and how this management has changed over time, further requires an examination of local reactions to both the assassination itself and the national media treatment of it; therefore I also consider the unique problems and, eventually, opportunities that the assassination site represented in the eyes of Dallas residents and civic leaders, which informed the transformation of the Depository building into a museum and officially sanctioned memorial/tourist attraction. This local history also shaped the city’s response to Oliver Stone’s use of Dealey Plaza to shoot a re-enactment of the assassination for his 1991 film *JFK*, a film that would briefly bring the assassination, and questions regarding it, back to the forefront of both local and national awareness.

The JFK assassination was a national media event that exemplifies what Henri LeFebvre calls television's "sudden violent intrusion of the whole world into family and 'private' life, 'presentified' in a way which directly captures the immediate moment, which offers truth and participation, or at least appears to do

so" (41). For forty-eight hours following the assassination, regular television programming was suspended for round-the-clock coverage that emphasized collective emotions. The networks relied on material from their Dallas affiliates, who had camera crews dispersed around key locations in the city. Broadcasting from the TradeMart, where the Kennedys were to have joined local civic leaders for a luncheon following the fatal parade, television cameras captured the initial confusion and anxiety as the Dallasites, like the viewers at home, waited for news of the President's condition. Bob Huffaker, a reporter for the local CBS affiliate, moved his film crew from a location near the parade route to Parkland Hospital, where the camera panned over tear-streaked faces as Huffaker narrated the "scene of indescribable sadness and horror": "Faces are ashen white, and people are wondering, is our president going to live?" Cameras also followed investigators to Elm Street, zooming up the face of the Depository to the sixth floor window, which had been quickly identified by witnesses as a possible location from which shots had been fired (*JFK: Breaking the News*). Other witnesses claimed to have heard or seen gunfire from the direction of a fence behind a clump of trees in Dealey Plaza. An early police radio report, quoting words used by witnesses, described this area as a "grassy knoll," a term that was picked up by reporters and, eventually, the public (Peeler; L. Wright, 100). Such news reports simultaneously perform what Dean MacCannell describes as the three stages of "sight sacralization:" the "naming," "framing" (as media inherently "frame" their object, separating what is "of interest"

from its surroundings), and "mechanical reproduction" phases (1999: 44-45)⁴. David Dillon notes in the *Dallas Morning News* that "the average American watched 32 hours of television the weekend of John Kennedy's assassination, and spent countless more poring over newspapers and photographs" (C3).



Fig. 3: The grassy knoll in 2003 (photo by Shelley McGinnis)

One of the "most photographed and scrutinized public spaces in America," Dealey Plaza "is so familiar, and so inscrutable" (Dillon, 1993). Some of the most familiar and widely-circulated images of Dealey Plaza come from the 16 mm film taken with a home-movie camera by clothing manufacturer Abraham Zapruder. It has become commonplace to observe that if "something like" the Kennedy assassination were to occur today, it would be captured from every conceivable

⁴ In 1977, Rick Anderson of Minneapolis described his visit to Dealey Plaza to Tom Belden of the *Dallas Morning News* thus; "It was a very eerie feeling...all of the sudden I'm standing on the grassy knoll."

angle by dozens of video cameras. But perhaps one reason that the imagery of the assassination has become so iconic is the singular visual record of it – we have no more and no less than one movie of it. In 1963, a number of the Dallasites who gathered downtown to watch the presidential motorcade had one of the 8 mm or 16 mm film cameras then being marketed for personal use; Zapruder, who took a couple of hours from work that day to see the procession, happened to be the only one who had a clear shot of the presidential limo for the entire six seconds of gunfire, and therefore found himself the possessor of what would seem to be a complete visual record of the event.

Zapruder had positioned himself upon a concrete retaining wall along Elm Street, looking toward Houston Street and Dealey Plaza – and, coincidentally, between the Book Depository building and the grassy knoll. Richard Stolley, a *Life* correspondent who saw the film the next morning, recalls, “we saw the motorcade snaking around Dealey Plaza, Jackie in that pink suit, the armful of roses, the handsome President smiling and waving, and almost as if in one motion bringing both hands up to his neck which a bullet has just pierced, and then frame 313, the shattering instant when the top of his skull is blown away, soundlessly” (1973: 134).

The first few seconds of the film are actually devoted to Zapruder’s friends and coworkers, who had positioned themselves along the grassy knoll to watch the motorcade. The camera then turns toward Houston street, its lens zoomed in as far as it would go, as the Lincoln convertible appears, moving slowly through the crowds lining both sides of the street. At frame 230, Kennedy reacts visibly to being

shot, slumping to his left toward Jackie, who moves as if to cradle his head. Frame 313: "Then I saw his head open up," Zapruder told local television station WFAA later, "All blood and everything, and I kept on shooting." Zapruder pans left to right, following the car as Jackie Kennedy climbs onto the back and extends her hand to a secret service agent. The car speeds past the bystanders, including a woman in a bright red dress and a man incongruously holding a black umbrella aloft, and disappears under the overpass.



Fig. 4: In 2003, a visitor (2nd from right) takes pictures from the "Zapruder spot," where Abraham Zapruder filmed a 16 mm movie of the assassination (photo by Shelley McGinnis)

The morning after the assassination, *Life* bought the print rights for \$50,000. Two days later, while a bidding war was still in progress for the motion picture rights, "the film was shown to Time Inc. executives in New York. *Life's* publisher,

the late C.D. Jackson, was so upset by the head-wound sequence that he proposed the company obtain all rights to the film and withhold it from public viewing at least until emotions had calmed" (Stolley, 1973: 135). Zapruder agreed to sell all the rights to the film for \$150,000. "An important reason that *Life*, and not one of our competitors, got the film was our promise that we would never use it in a crude or tasteless way, nor allow anyone else to do so," Richard Stolley, who negotiated the purchase, suggests (1998: 45).

The graphic violence of the film, in particular the fatal head shot, is frequently attributed with provoking a strong physiological response in the viewer. In 1973, Stolley asserted that of "the few hundred people" who had seen the film, "some have become almost nauseated, others gasped out loud" (134). Stolley recalls that "During our negotiations, Zapruder said again and again how worried he was about possible exploitation...He told me about a dream he'd had the night before: He was walking through Times Square and came upon a barker urging tourists to step inside a sleazy theater to watch the President die on the big screen" (1998: 48). This striking dream-transformation of assassination into pornography illuminates one of the more shadowy dimensions of the film's emergence as a public text: the public desire to see it, manifesting in part as a response to *Life's* management of the film as a closely guarded visual secret. "To this day," Stolley wrote in 1973, "the film has never been shown publicly" (135). This was not strictly true, but Stolley's assertion speaks directly to Michael Warner's argument concerning the shifting meanings of the term "public:" the "way *the* public functions in the public sphere (as the people)

is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. The peculiar character of a public is that it is a space of discourse organized by discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized; and herein lies its power, as well as its elusive strangeness" (2002: 68-69). Although the Zapruder film was shown by New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison at Clay Shaw's trial for conspiracy in 1968 (a trial that was open to the public), Time, Inc. refused to allow the film to be shown on television, the means by which it could become a text truly accessible to public discourse. "We decided not to authorize the film's use on television," Stolley recalls, "partly for competitive reasons, partly because the head wound in motion is far more ghastly than in print" (1998: 48).

Life published a black-and-white series of 13 frames from the film in its November 29, 1963 edition, described as the "split second sequence as the bullets struck" (White, 24). "*Life* immediately published all key frames except 313, which showed the head wound," Stolley writes, "At the time, we wanted to spare the Kennedy family that appalling sight" (1998: 48). Frame 313 was finally published a year later, when *Life* covered the findings of the Warren Commission. In the week after the assassination, four frames of the film were also published, unaccredited, in *Life's* sister publication *Time*: the sequence of Jackie Kennedy crawling onto the back of the car. Each frame is labeled with a descriptive caption that interprets the action represented: "JACKIE SEEKS HELP," "CRAWLS TOWARD SECRET SERVICE AGENT," "CAR SPEEDS UP," "SHE PULLS THE AGENT ABOARD." Beneath the series was printed another, epitaph-like caption: "Never for an instant did she think

of flight.” “All discourse or performance addressed to a public,” Michael Warner argues, “must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world through address...Public discourse says not only ‘Let a public exist’ but ‘Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way’” (2002: 114). The Zapruder film entered public discourse through a very carefully managed address. Its public was defined through the choice to make the film accessible only as still photographs, through the selection of which frames to print, and through the imposition of an interpretation upon both the denotative content of each image, and the cultural purpose and meaning of the imagery itself.

The corporate owners of the film, Time Inc., were not the only authorized managers of its meanings. “*Life* did, of course, supply copies of the film to the Warren Commission and other government agencies” (Stolley, 1973: 135). The Warren Commission famously used the Zapruder film as a “script” for re-enacting the crime. A reporter from Newsweek who observed one of these events described it thus:

Another agent was posted on the sixth floor with suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald’s mail-order rifle, a camera fitted to its telescopic sight. Others lined the roadway, shooting pictures, measuring times and distances, gauging angles with surveyors’ transits, stage-managing the whole grim shadow play – frame by frame – from the remarkable amateur movie that captured the event.

Time and again, the car rounded the curve past a crowd of 500 silent spectators, stopping, starting, stopping in a series of tableaux that seemed to stop time itself. *Click!*

went the hammer. The car stopped. The man in the back seat froze, hands at his throat, elbows high – the posture of the President when the first bullet struck his back. And then the car moved on. (“Nightmare,” 48).

This reduction of the historical event to the terms of film (and to the point of view of the camera) is satirized in *The Eternal Frame*, a collaborative effort produced in 1975 by alternative video collective T.R. Uthco and the multi-media performance group Ant Farm. By documenting the group’s own re-enactments of the motorcade and assassination, including shots of the performers rehearsing and getting into costume as well as interviews with participants and observers, *The Eternal Frame* functions, Art Simon suggests, “as a critique of the investigatory mode, questioning whatever residual faith in the image continues to motivate visits to the visual evidence” (1996: 145). Rather than trying to “get inside” the image to get closer to the truth of the assassination, the group’s performance suggests a representation of what is already a simulation; addressing the viewer in his role as Kennedy, Doug Hall claims that he was never “more than another image on your television sets;” his “image-death” has helped him to “render the ultimate sacrifice to the media that created me.” The image of the assassination has become the “reality” against which the group’s live performance is inevitably measured. Images thus assume epistemological authority as historic truth, and take the place of memory. An older man observing the reenactment with two teenagers proudly draws their attention to Doug Michels’s impersonation of Jackie climbing onto the back of the car: “See, that’s just what she did.” He *doesn’t* say “Never for an instant did she think of

flight,” yet those words clearly inform his recognition of the act. Public discourse, Michael Warner argues,

...lies under the necessity of addressing its public as already existing real persons. It cannot work by frankly declaring its subjunctive-creative project. Its success depends on the recognition of participants and their further circulatory activity, and people do not commonly recognize themselves as virtual projections. They recognize themselves only as being already the persons they are addressed as being and as already belonging to the world that is condensed in their discourse (2002: 114).

Watching the reenactment, tourists in Dealey Plaza are moved to share their memories of the assassination; one woman becomes almost tearful, calling the performance “too beautiful,” a display of emotion that the performers find strange and inappropriate. *The Eternal Frame* thus critiques the power of the image to define reality, which has only grown since the assassination. The group’s camera captures the presence of batteries of tourist cameras recording the staged assassination – “I got it all!” one man exclaims with satisfaction – suggesting the omnipresence of the camera eye that captures, and creates, “news” in our current cultural climate.

The Eternal Frame refers to another important movement in the Zapruder film’s history: its transformation from photography to video. This is most clearly visible in the opening seconds, when a video dub of a bootleg version of the actual Zapruder film is seen with a video date stamp imposed on it. This is apt, for *The Eternal Frame* was made in the aftermath of ABC’s 1975 broadcast of a bootleg copy. In 1973, Richard Stolley expressed certainty about the number of copies of the

Zapruder film in existence. At the time he purchased the print rights to the film, Abraham Zapruder “assured me he had obtained sworn statements from the men at the color lab that they had not bootlegged any extra prints of the film. Whoever bought the film would have it exclusively” (135). Apart from the original kept in a “Time Inc. safe” (262), there were the two copies Zapruder made for the FBI and the Dallas police the night of the assassination, as well as the copy *Life* later supplied to the Warren Commission. By 1975, the existence of privately circulating bootleg copies could not be overlooked. Robert Groden, an “optics expert” and critic of the Warren Commission, began doing speaking engagements and press conferences with a copy of the Zapruder film which he used to support his claim that Kennedy and Connally could not have been wounded by the same bullet. The film made an even more drastic transition into the court of public opinion in March of 1975, when Geraldo Rivera, on an episode of his late-night talk show *Good Night, America* devoted to JFK conspiracy theories, aired Groden’s copy of the film, “daring us, in effect,” Stolley wrote in 1998, “to sue” (1998: 43). Interestingly, *Life* did *not* sue. Geraldo successfully defied copyright law by framing his illegal broadcast of the film in terms of the public’s right to know and judge for itself, leaving *Life* with the prospect of occupying a discursively anti-public position if it tried to protect its copyright. Instead, Time, Inc. simply sold the rights to the film back to the Zapruder family for the nominal sum of \$1, relinquishing its claim of “stewardship” of this historical artifact. By 1978, the film was licensed for documentary and news use, and was the subject of documentaries on CBS and the BBC. Dissected frame by

frame, optically enhanced, parsed by a multitude of diverse captions and narratives, the Zapruder film has undergone a transformation from shocking and taboo to familiar and iconic, making the Book Depository, the white colonnades of Dealey Plaza, and the Triple Underpass some of the most identifiable structures in the United States. As Lindalyn Adams says, "it's a recognizable place. People who come to the city for the first time immediately recognize it from the photos" (Flick, "1963").

MacCannell suggests that it is "the mechanical reproduction phase of sacralization that is most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object. And he is not disappointed. Alongside the copies of it, it has to be the Real Thing" (1999: 45). A survey done by the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1993 confirmed that Dealey Plaza was the top tourist destination in North Texas (Flick, "1963"). This was in the wake of the opening and promotion of The Sixth Floor Museum (an exhibit dedicated to the assassination housed on the sixth floor of the Depository building), and publicity pertaining to Oliver Stone's 1991 film *JFK* and subsequent debates about the assassination and the many conspiracy theories surrounding it. All of these factors have been credited with bringing unprecedented numbers of tourists to Dealey Plaza in the 1990s. Yet the site had always attracted visitors. A *Dallas Morning News* article from 1977 refers to the "wave of tourists that sometimes still flow over the plaza area and stop to gape at the sixth floor window" (Belden, "Doubters"). *Morning News* columnist Jim Wright acknowledges the site's status as what MacCannell terms a "must see" while

writing about some visitors from Germany: "After picking up Ingrid and Klaus at DFW, I took them around to the standard tourist things, beginning with the JFK assassination site and the gee whiz Chamber of Commerce attractions" (A15).

Lindalyn Adams of the Dallas County Historic Commission was for years "offended that people came to Dallas just to see the shooting site. Surely there were so many other wonderful things to see: from the museums to the symphony" (Minutaglio). Ms. Adams's response to this perceived problem was an ingenious one: make the shooting site *into* a museum. Adams would be one of the driving forces behind the creation of The Sixth Floor Museum in the 1980s.

In fact, as early as 1967, Helen Callaway wrote that "It is painful for Dallas to face, but the assassination site has been the No. 1 tourist attraction ever since Nov. 22, 1963. A Dallas sightseeing bus driver told *The News* that visitors always show the greatest interest in the Elm-Houston area where rifle shots cracked and changed the course of history." In the months following the assassination, some 2,000 handwritten notes were left in Dealey Plaza, mostly by out-of-town visitors (Rangel, "Messages"). Many were collected by city park employees and donated to the Dallas Public Library, where they are still kept. One says, "I'm sorry, maybe someday I can forgive Dallas."

The sense of being blamed by the rest of the nation is the key to the "pain" Ms. Callaway refers to, in describing the reaction of Dallas residents to the interest out-of-town visitors show in the "area where rifle shots cracked and changed the course of history." It is not clear exactly when or in what context the term "City of Hate"

first appeared, but it is clear that Dallas was developing a reputation for political extremism for some time before Kennedy's visit. Shortly before the 1960 election that would put Kennedy in office, vice-presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson made a campaign trip to Dallas on the same day that a group of three hundred women were canvassing downtown for Republican congressman Bruce Alger. Alger provided his "tag girls" with placards bearing such slogans as "Judas Johnson" and "LBJ Traitor" (L. Wright, 62), suggesting that the Texan Johnson had betrayed his background by aligning himself with the liberal East coast. As Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson emerged from a car in front of their hotel, the picketers crowded around them aggressively. Some spat at the candidate, and according to one report, one of the Republican canvassers "impulsively snatched Mrs. Johnson's gloves from her hands and threw them in the gutter" (L. Wright, 62). Wright considers it "the most triumphant half-hour of Johnson's career, because that evening on the television news millions of Americans saw the new Lyndon Johnson" (64), bearing the brunt of conservative belligerence with dignity. When U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson made a speaking appearance in Dallas in October of 1963, he was greeted by an audience salted with supporters of local archconservative General Edwin Walker, who disrupted the talk with constant heckling. One man shouted, "Kennedy will get his reward in Hell! And Stevenson is going to die!" (L. Wright, 67). When city leaders wired an apology to Stevenson, General Walker hung the flag outside his home upside down in protest, telling reporters, "Adlai got what was coming to him" (L. Wright, 93). Lawrence Wright recalls that before these incidents,

"Dallas had had very little national identity, but now we found ourselves with a new municipal image: a city of angry parvenus, smug, doctrinaire, belligerent – a city with a taste for political violence" (64).

These events created an atmosphere of expectation on the occasion of Kennedy's visit; people on all sides of the political divide were expecting an incident of some kind. William Manchester writes that "the announcement that the President would visit there had provoked a widespread reaction. The most casual newspaper readers – even those who couldn't place the city on a map – knew that it had a history of ugly incidents" (1968: 38). And Lawrence Wright, a Dallas high-school student at the time, recalled that "Later, the guilt we felt for Kennedy's death would have less to do with the assassination by a man only slightly associated with our city than it would have to do with our own feelings of anticipation. Something would happen – *something*. We expected to be disgraced. It had happened with Lyndon Johnson, it had happened with Stevenson, it would happen again" (99).

The morning of Kennedy's visit, an ad appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* that read, "Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas: a city so disgraced by a recent liberal smear attempt that its citizens have just elected two more Conservative Americans to public office...a city that will continue to grow and prosper despite efforts by you and your administration to penalize it for its nonconformity to 'New Frontierism.'" (Manchester, 95). A flier was circulated and posted in various locations that featured photos of Kennedy, full face and profile, as in a mug shot. The text declared Kennedy "WANTED FOR TREASON," and listed a number of "crimes."



WANTED FOR TREASON

THIS MAN is wanted for treasonous activities against the United States:

1. Betraying the Constitution (which he swore to uphold):
He is turning the sovereignty of the U.S. over to the communist controlled United Nations.
He is betraying our friends (Cuba, Katanga, Portugal) and befriend-
ing our enemies (Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland).
2. He has been **WRONG** on innumerable issues affecting the security of the U.S. (United Nations-Berlin wall-Missile removal-Cuba-Wheat deals-Test Ban Treaty, etc.)

3. He has been lax in enforcing Communist Registration laws.
4. He has given support and encouragement to the Communist inspired racial riots.
5. He has illegally invaded a sovereign State with federal troops.
6. He has consistently appointed Anti-Christians to Federal office: Upholds the Supreme Court in its Anti-Christian rulings. Aliens and known Communists abound in Federal offices.
7. He has been caught in fantastic LIES to the American people (including personal ones like his previous marriage and divorce).

Fig. 5: An anonymous flyer distributed in Dallas at the time of Kennedy's visit in 1963 (Part of the Joe M. Dealey, Jr. Collection at The Sixth Floor Museum)

The expectation that the president's visit might be marked by an "incident" made it more natural for commentators after the assassination to view it at least

partially as a result of the city's political climate. Manchester's 1967 book is itself an excellent example of this view; he meticulously documents evidence of the city's inhospitable attitude toward the Kennedys. James Pennebaker recalls that:

Residents of Dallas were not blind to America's rage. Many endured humiliating incidents that suggested that the rest of the country held them personally responsible for the assassination. When traveling out of state, some Dallas families were refused service at restaurants and filling stations. Schoolchildren threw rocks at cars with Texas license plates. Long-distance operators disconnected their calls. Dallas students attending out-of-state colleges were hounded by their peers. Lee Harvey Oswald, a relative newcomer to Dallas who had lived in the Soviet Union for over a year, had murdered the president and Dallas was taking the blame (1990: 169).

Pennebaker's last line offers, as a spontaneous, subjective bewilderment, a defensive counter-position constructed by the *Dallas Morning News* and other local media in the wake of the assassination, and periodically re-articulated for years afterward. In 1968, a brief, anonymous editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* reads in its entirety:

No Labeling

There were few slurs directed at Memphis after Martin Luther King was shot. There were no attempts to label Los Angeles a city of hate or its entire populace deranged extremists.

In both cases the wrath was reserved for those directly responsible. This, Dallas agrees, is as it should be.

Nick Couldry argues that the legitimization of the media's authority is "continually reproduced" through "countless actions on many different levels, including the local" (2001: 40). He is particularly interested in cases "when people see the media process close up – rather than in the relaxed, but distanced, content of everyday consumption," as well as "the *spaces* where those interactions take place: studios, filming locations, sites of news coverage, and so on" (3-4). Couldry argues that in such cases "the media's symbolic power is most likely to be contested." In Dallas, some residents felt a disconnect between their city as they saw it being represented in the national media and as they felt it to be in their daily lives – though others, such as writer Warren Leslie and African-American church leader Reverend William Holmes, saw it as an opportunity to call attention to real problems with the city's political climate and structure. The local media, however, focused predominantly on articulating the first reaction, as exemplified in this 1969 editorial by Larry Howell in the *Dallas Morning News*:

There is no way to know how many people, six years ago, asked themselves, 'If this is a city of hate, what am I doing here in the church, or ringing doorbells for muscular dystrophy, or volunteer nursing, or working with disadvantaged Cub Scouts?'

...Much of what was written and said about Dallas in those dark, sad days of late 1963 simply was not true. And it seemed the harder the writer or commentator strained to indict the populace hereabouts, the more errors of fact he committed. The Dallas resident could check the story out on the spot and determine for himself its accuracy. From personal knowledge, he could tell that some of the so-called facts weren't facts at all.

The “media culture” (Couldry, 6) of Dallas was dominated at the time by the *Dallas Morning News*. The *Morning News* was founded in 1885 by George Dealey, a committed progressive who used the paper as an instrument to attack the Ku Klux Klan (L. Wright, 65). George Dealey was succeeded by his son Ted as owner and editor, and the son’s politics drove the direction and tone of the paper as much as the father’s had. But Ted Dealey’s politics were dominated by hard-line anti-communism, and under his leadership the paper became unapologetically reactionary. Lawrence Wright recalls that in the 1960s, “reading the *News* each morning was like watching a big-screen brawl in a saloon, in which the newspaper’s editorials flattened the ‘socialists’ (read: Democrats), the ‘Judicial Kremlin’ (the U.S. Supreme Court), and virtually every representative of the federal government whose views differed from those of Ted Dealey” (65). Dealey did not hesitate to characterize himself and his paper as the voice of a segment of the population that lacked a voice in the national media.

Lee Harvey Oswald’s status as a newcomer and “outsider,” for whom the city need bear no responsibility, was a frequent theme in the *Morning News*, as was the suggestion that the city was being “slandered” by the liberal national media as punishment for its conservative culture. In 1967, Dick West editorialized:

Looking back 48 months, why was Dallas so universally singled out for stigma and opprobrium after a tragedy that could happen on Fifth Avenue as well as Elm Street? A basic reason was because Dallas itself had gained a

reputation for its political conservatism – one which had its fanatical fringe but for the most part was genuine in principle and performance.

Liberals everywhere – yes, many in Dallas – did their best to equate this city with "hate" and "bigotry"...Time not only heals, it corrects. And the historian who is honest will write that Dallas was shocked and grieved, but not guilty; and that the charges of "hate" and "bigotry" not only were unfair – they were stupid and false.

Lindalyn Adams of the Historical Society says, of the local political climate, "there was a polarization of conservatives and liberals. There were very deep feelings on both sides that their position was the right one, and there was mistrust on both sides. But talk about hate – the hate was heaped upon us by the world" (L. Wright, 67). Lawrence Wright recalls that "we felt sorry for ourselves, all right. The city's display of self-pity was another reason to hate us. The impression we gave was that Oswald's real crime was not murder but libel – of our reputation, our good name. We were not penitent, we were outraged. We were the victims" (103).

James Pennebaker, a Southern Methodist University professor of psychology who has researched the effect of the assassination on Dallasites, links the event to the subsequent abandonment of the West End district where the Depository building stood, arguing that Dallas "coped by turning away from the immediate past, to the construction of a gleaming new skyline" in a new downtown several blocks east of the old city center. It was "right after that," he says, "that Dallas became a city obsessed with the future" (Marvel, 1F). Gail Thomas, director of the

Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, says, "For many years, we were so terribly embarrassed about it, we couldn't allow it to be an open issue. Therefore, we didn't go through an open grieving period." Resident Doris Dollar agrees: "For quite a while, it wasn't talked about. It hurt too much" (Marvel, 1F). Pennebaker recalls that

When our family moved to Dallas in 1983, one of the first things we did was to go see the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository...The building had been purchased by the county and now housed government administrators. The top floors of the building, however, were vacant and sealed from the public. Nowhere was there any indication that the building or surrounding area had any historic significance. Here an event had happened that had changed the course of American history, but the city was pretending that nothing had happened. Not only was Dallas trying to forget the assassination, but there were virtually no reminders of Kennedy anywhere. Unlike in Houston or neighboring Fort Worth, in Dallas there were no schools, streets, or buildings named after Kennedy. This couldn't be attributed to an antiliberal bias because several private and public schools and buildings were named after Martin Luther King.

In 1986, some people placed a log book on the first floor of the School Book Depository for people to sign and make brief remarks. Thousands of visitors had signed it along with statements such as 'Open the sixth floor!' Ironically, almost no one from Dallas had signed it. One of the only ones who had done so noted, "Shameful. We would be better off destroying the building." (1990: 169-170).

Pennebaker offers a psychological explanation for Dallas's negative response to interest in the site. "Collectively, residents of Dallas faced a powerful and unique

trauma," he writes. "Something horrible had happened in their community and there was nothing they could do about it. A group of leading Dallas citizens met soon after the assassination and decided that Dallas must move rapidly ahead"(169). This was the impetus, he suggests, driving subsequent plans "to construct an international airport, to build the tallest skyscrapers in the Southwest, and to create a progressive business climate. Dallas was to be the city of the future. And the city without a past." (169).

Dallas struggled with how to commemorate Kennedy; in 1964, a city committee took suggestions from contributors for what sort of memorial would be appropriate. Mrs. Anne McVaughn favored erecting a memorial on the site of the assassination, saying, "It is going to be a memorial whether we do anything about it or not." Fred G. Willie said, "Destroy the Texas School Book Depository. Rubble buried in an undisclosed spot or dumped into the sea." Mary Trinkle wanted to "empty, seal up and paint black" the building (Suggestions to the Memorial Committee, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University).

As historian Conover Hunt has suggested, "There is an inherent conflict in Dallas history...the cradle of Dallas is also the grave of the president, as it were. It's a tremendous conflict that cannot be resolved in any kind of simple fashion" (Real, "6th Floor"). By "the cradle of Dallas," Hunt means Dealey Plaza, a small park of grass, trees, and concrete colonnades built by the WPA in the 1930s to mark the original land grant where John Neely Bryan founded Dallas in the 1840s. The park, which was named in 1935 after George B. Dealey, the founder of the *Dallas Morning*

News, also represents the Western "gateway" to Dallas, spanning the place where Stemmons Freeway diverges into three major downtown streets, Commerce, Main, and Elm. The Texas School Book Depository sits at the northern end of the Plaza, overlooking Elm Street.

After the Depository building was bought in 1970 by Aubrey Mayhew, an entrepreneur and collector of Kennedy memorabilia from Nashville, whose plans for a private museum ended in a failed arson attempt and bankruptcy, scandalized city commissioners gave serious thought to having the building razed. Many members of the Dallas Citizens Council "had publicly and privately said that Dallas needed to look toward growth – needed to band together to build an awesome airport, attract corporations, field a winning football team – and forget about the past" (Minutaglio). However Judson Shook, Dallas County's director of public works, began making inquiries into the county's purchasing the building. "If we buy that building and tear it down, what do you think people are going to think?" was the potent question he asked. For years, he later told the *Dallas Morning News*, he had from his office across the street observed visitors leaving the locked building in frustration, and worried that they were taking away the impression that Dallas simply did not care about the tragedy that had taken place there. "All those visitors believed Dallas had a collective secret," he recalled, "Dallas needed to take control of its perceived secret – to take responsibility for how people felt about the city and its past" (Minutaglio).

The county succeeded in purchasing the building for \$400,000 in 1977, and installed its administrative offices on the first five floors while Lindalyn Adams,

chair of the Dallas County Historical Foundation, was brought in to direct the creation of a commemorative exhibit on the sixth floor. Adams had spent years "answering the same questions from the national and international media...Where is Dallas' recognition of what happened? Why can't Dallas do something to acknowledge the tragedy?" (Minutaglio). Adams campaigned for funding from the Dallas Citizens Council, the influential and wealthy city leaders who Conover Hunt describes as "the 'community rememberers' – the ones who had a huge financial stake in the community memory and who had a huge hand in shaping the community memory;" the approach Adams' proposals took emphasized that the exhibit would not be a "guilt trip," but rather "it would be educational. It would be about healing. It would be – if this could be possible – positive." Financier John Stemmons heard her out and then pronounced grimly, "It has to be done." (Minutaglio). The fundraising efforts would receive a boost in 1983, when the twentieth anniversary of the assassination renewed national interest, and in 1984, when the Republican National Convention focused national attention on Dallas. Shortly thereafter, County Judge Lee Jackson freed \$2.2 million in county funds to help restore and renovate the building.

At an early stage in the exhibition planning, Conover Hunt was hired to curate, and began to oversee an 11-year process in which over 2500 photos and documents were considered and 67 hours of footage was reduced to 43 minutes of film destined for exhibition in the museum. She recalls a tremendous frustration, anxiety, and "frequent headaches" resulting from the difficult questions she and her

team had to navigate in assembling the exhibit: "How much blood to show? How graphic should the photos be? Should the tragic events of that weekend be the focus, or should the exhibit concentrate on Mr. Kennedy's life? Should Oswald's memory be preserved?" (Real, "6th Floor").

These questions reflect a complex understanding of what the museum should and should not do. The purpose of the exhibit was understood by its designers to be multifaceted. It represents, most simply, a memorial, a place of public commemoration. Jeff West, executive director of the museum, writes, "In our country we preserve the places where heroes have fallen – the Alamo, Gettysburg, the USS Arizona. We take the sites of tragedy and bloodshed and consecrate them through preservation, interpretation and commemoration" (Hunt, 6). This memorial function, evoking what Ian Reader describes as the "'going out and coming back' initiated by an emotional response" to the object of a pilgrimage (1993: 220), is explicitly linked to the idea of catharsis. "Before, the grassy knoll and Philip Johnson's open-air memorial were all Dallas offered those who came to commemorate and grieve. But with the addition of The Sixth Floor, visitors can get a sense of closure in their pilgrimage to Dealey Plaza, says University of Texas political professor Bruce Buchanan" (Bass). Buchanan draws upon the language of psychology rather than political science to talk about the exhibit, saying, "it seems to me that the best way (to overcome the stigma) is not to resist such monuments, but to let them exist, to let them be a form of catharsis, to let them bleed themselves out" (Bass).

“Every American who recalls the day Kennedy was shot,” Conover Hunt argues, “needs to resolve the pain, needs to experience closure” (M. Greene), and the museum offers an opportunity for people to “touch that experience in themselves once again and feel a release, much like that experienced by those who visit the Vietnam Memorial” (Real, “6th Floor”). Robin Doussard, a writer for the *Fort Lauderdale News & Sun-Sentinel*, describes a visit to the museum as just such an experience, the emotional high-point of which was to “stand next to where Oswald allegedly stood, seeing it through his eyes, from his perspective. To be able to do this finally, after nearly three decades, is mesmerizing. Almost a relief.” By restoring and opening the Depository, she concludes, “the city offers a balm to the rest of America for a wound that has proven impossible to heal” (G8). “Museum employees are accustomed to seeing patrons with tear-stained faces roving through the exhibits,” the *Dallas Morning News* observed in 1996. “The visitors’ log is filled with entries revealing lingering grief. But it also contains words of gratitude expressing relief” (M. Greene). The cathartic function takes on a special significance for Dallas natives. Gail Thomas recalls that she was able to weep over the assassination for the first time upon visiting the Sixth Floor. For a Dallasite who remembers that day, she says, “It’s not even clear what we cry for – for our city, for the lost president” (Marvel, 1F).

The other most frequently cited need met by the exhibit is education. Historical exhibits, Conover Hunt claims, “show us where we’ve been and what we’ve had to go through as a nation,” a shared knowledge that is “the very

foundation that holds us together. We don't have a common religion. We don't have a common heritage. We're not all of the same race. But we do have a common civil religion: American democracy" (M. Greene). The educational function of the museum, she says, is particularly important for those born after the assassination. "They have grown up with such carnage [on television] that assassination does not trigger any emotion with these kids," says Hunt, "They want to understand why we're so upset after all these years. They want to understand that personality that galvanized public opinion" (M. Greene). Buses of schoolchildren regularly tour the museum; on one occasion, I encountered such a group diligently filling in a worksheet with information gleaned from the exhibits, answering such questions as "What happened to the person accused of the killing?" with statements such as "He got shot." Attempting, as Conover Hunt says, "to bring some sort of educational perspective to the audience that comes" (Real, "6th Floor") is a second method for creating an "appropriate" experience of the site.

Finally, a less frequently articulated but no less weighty function of the exhibit is to interpret Dallas' role in the national tragedy for the rest of the nation in a manner that speaks to the intolerable "City of Hate" label. As Conover Hunt puts it, "I would like to think that, if we did our jobs well, the visitors who come from across the United States can go home and thank God that something like this has not happened in their town" (Real, "6th Floor"). A local resident who volunteers as a docent at the museum comments that "this is the way I can tell the world that the people in Dallas are not to blame" (Powell, "Once Again").

The exhibit, which finally opened in February of 1989, contains about 400 copies of photos and documents (mostly reproduced from originals stored in the National Archives in College Park, Maryland), as well as a small collection of artifacts including the original “Sniper’s window,” the place setting intended for Kennedy’s lunch at the Trademart after the procession, the FBI’s scale model of Dealey Plaza, and a collection of cameras belonging to witnesses, including the famous Zapruder 8mm movie camera. Two particularly fraught areas, the “Sniper’s Perch” and the “Rifle Location,” have been glassed in, with replica book boxes arranged to reproduce the layout from police photographs. The displays are arranged with informative and interpretive text blocks upon laminate boards, which are affixed to the original structural supports of the warehouse in a manner that guides the visitor through the exhibit in a specific sequence.



Fig. 6: the lobby of The Sixth Floor Museum (photo 2001 by Shelley McGinnis)

An elevator from the first floor lobby brings visitors to the north side of the sixth floor, where the exhibit introduces the culture of "The Early Sixties." Gradually the focus becomes more local and specific, as the viewer learns about the Kennedy family, the Kennedy presidency, the "Trip to Texas," and "Reception in Dallas." "The Assassination" is offset by a markedly different look than the rest of the exhibit, featuring text commentary first and then, separately, small (9"x5") black and white photos mounted on large black boards. Passing through this section, the visitor comes to the corner window "Sniper's Perch" ("the corner window transfixes," Florida reporter Robin Doussard recalled in an account) and a view of Dealey Plaza and the underpass where an X marks the position of the president's car at the moment of the shooting. The visitor then passes through displays devoted to the aftermath of the assassination, "The Crisis Hours," "The Investigations," and "Who Did It?" The last section, "The Legacy," includes tributes from world leaders, drawings by schoolchildren, and a short film. Before exiting, the visitor is invited to write in the "Memory Books."

As visitors exit at the north elevator where they came in, they pass a table with large, blank volumes and pens, and are hailed by these words: "We invite you to record your personal messages in these books. Your reflections will help future historians to interpret the meaning of this part of history to our nation and to the world." Some respondents are willingly interpellated to offer eulogy, personal history, and testimony to the effect of the museum and the emotional power of the

site itself – “a sad corner of Dallas, a small part of America that belongs to everyone,” as one visitor from England describes it (Real, “6th Floor”). Pennebaker cites three comments that he says “Were recorded by native Dallasites on the opening day of the exhibit and reflect the general tone of the remarks by Dallas natives”:

I wasn't in favor of this [exhibit] but now, after seeing it and experiencing it, I feel so much better. It's helpful to those who live here to be able to show how much we care.

This great city has finally recovered from this tragedy by facing up to it. As a native Dallasite who also loved John Kennedy, I hope the world realizes that Dallas did not kill Kennedy.

This exhibit is years late in opening, but I'm glad it has finally happened. The world changed forever on November 22, 1963. This exhibit finally allows those of us from Texas to look back, to think, and finally to put the events of that tragic day into some perspective (172).

Others are far less reverent, perhaps reflecting the conflict that Robert Markley characterizes as “desiring to be interpellated as stable subjects, as we believe or fear everyone else is, but clinging to the fantasy that our knowledge will fail us, that in not making sense we will find a means to resist the meaning imposed on us” (1999: 79). It is here, then, that a multi-vocal “public” constituted by real people reappears. Rather than reintroducing debate, however, or even conversation, the Memory Books give a sense of people talking to themselves. Although every entry is indeed archived by the museum, with the exception of a few selected for

reproduction in the museum's literature, most will go largely unread. Here, then, is a select but, I think, not unrepresentative sample of one week's worth of entries.

"It is interesting and moving to be in the very spot where such momentous things happened. I wish we understood it better." 2/14/01.

"I think you are wrong about the one bullet hitting both Kennedy and causing Connolly's wounds. The bullet is not traveling at the same angle." 2/14/01.

"I'm learning about Kennedy. I've gained a little faith back in the govt. (considering Clinton and all) it's nice to hear about such a great man."

"Every time I see the shooting I want to do something to stop it." 2/14/01.

"Compelling, tragic, SADNESS & THE END OF HOPE – FEELING AFTER THE ACT AND I WASN'T EVEN BORN YET 2/15/01.

"Although I wasn't born yet at the time of the assassination, this library helps me better understand what a giving man and family they were. God bless, thank you." 2/16/01

"Boom Boom Ha Ha Too BAD so SAD!!"

"I'm confused more than ever." 2/17/01.

"This exhibit tells the truth, but only of what everyone knows. What really happened is something we might never figure out. I sure hope we do, though." 2/17/01.

"I watched the movie about this accident, in Japan. So when I stood at the place where Oswald was, I felt shocked. I have strange feeling now. I'm confused, too. I wonder whether 'destiny' exists in this world..." 2/17/01.

"I am 24 years old and have never been able to connect with Kennedy til now. Thank you for letting generations like me be part of history." 2/17/01.

"I found the tour to be both interesting and upsetting. I really enjoyed it." 2/18/01.

"I came with my school and had a great time."

"visiting this building has brought back many memories of seeing this on television." 2/18/01

"This museum is a sad but very true and meaningful piece of history." 2/18/01

"It's ironic that the message above says 'paint us with all our blemishes and warts' – apparently JFK had none!! What about the extramarital affairs, mob ties and promotion of war?" 2/18/01.

"Our visit to this place has further strengthened our deep respect for JFK and has inspired to continue to be better human beings toward world peace." 2/19/01

"I could have done better. Love always, Fidel Castro."

"Dear JFK – I have walked through your museum. And I have to say I wish you were still around. You were a great guy. I think the government had something to do with it." 2/20/01.

"He probably wouldn't be famous if he had lived. But it is still a tragedy."

"Never to be forgotten. THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE." 2/21/01.

"I was just 12 when JFK died. All the innocence of childhood fled when I heard the news in my 7th grade classroom in Wellesley, Massachusetts."

"2009: Let the evidence come out." 2/21/01.

Dallas Morning News columnist Chris Tucker praised the Sixth Floor exhibit for commemorating "without hyperbole the life and presidency of John Kennedy, and examining without whitewash the circumstances of his death. The curators lay out what is known about those terrible days in 1963, and acknowledge that much is still unknown" (13A). This sense of the commendable "honesty" of the exhibit seems to derive from the way the exhibit conceives of its audience as an inclusive public that must be addressed at both national and local levels. As Doussard says, "The exhibit puts together bits of evidence and reality and conjecture and emotion that America has kept in its pockets and rubbed like a worry stone for going on 27 years, and empties those pockets on the table for everyone to see" (G8). Bob Hayes insists that the exhibit "does not take sides on whether there was a conspiracy" (Barber). A docent at the museum states that "People are always trying to get us to tell them what we think happened, but we don't do that. You go through pretty extensive training classes – you have 10 hours of training to be a docent; you follow the training manual. They want the tour to be presented in an ethical way" (Powell, "Once Again").

Chris Tucker acknowledges, "The Sixth Floor deals, as it must with the myriad conspiracy theories" (Tucker, 13A). However, the exhibit deals with the topic in a manner that attempts to manage, curtail, and contain it. One notable way in which the discourse of conspiracy is limited is implicit in the design of the exhibit itself; the visitor encounters a display titled "The Evidence," featuring extensive

recounting of medical, ballistic, photographic and documental evidence, before passing into "Who Did It?" This sequence invokes a familiar and logical narrative of investigation procedure, which in effect replaces the actual historical investigation, in which Oswald was identified as the gunman by both the police and the press long before all the evidence had been accumulated and evaluated.

The display titled "Conspiracy?" notes laconically that "groups and individuals placed under suspicion have included the governments of Cuba, the Soviet Union, pro- and anti-Castroites, organized crime, wealthy conservative American oil interests, the FBI, the CIA, the Secret Service, the Dallas Police Department, government leaders and aliens from outer space." This minimal, noncommittal list, that lumps together such a vast array of theories of varying sophistication and popular acceptance, seems to take advantage of what Jameson decried as conspiracy theory's "slippage into sheer theme and content" (1988: 356). The display also offers a quote from Norman Redlich, a special assistant on the Warren Commission, that evokes Skip Willman's concept of "contingency theory" (cf. p. 13): "There are simply a great many people who cannot accept that one rather insignificant person was able to assassinate the President of the United States." Recalling Willman's argument that "Contingency theory salvages the American status quo by . . . spinning these often traumatic events as the product of 'addled individuals'" (25), it is perhaps not surprising that some visitors find this treatment of conspiracy theory unsatisfying. A local woman making a visit after seeing Oliver Stone's *JFK* said "I feel a lot of the facts aren't addressed here" (Barber).

Discursive elements of the assassination that are excluded, contained or downplayed in the Sixth Floor exhibit, the central, "official" local purveyor of assassination interpretation, tend to reemerge in the context of an unofficial, more blatantly commercial assassination tourism industry. For example, while the exhibit notes, in a section entitled "Reception in Dallas," that "small ultra-conservative extremist groups, including the John Birch Society and the Indignant White Citizens Council, were active in the community," and mentions that concern over the heckling of Lyndon Johnson and Adlai Stevenson in the city led community leaders to "call for a dignified reception of the president," the copy of *JFK News* sold to me for \$3 in March of 2001 by a street vendor in the Plaza reproduces in its entirety the notorious "Wanted for Treason" flier that was posted along the motorcade route which accused Kennedy of giving "support and encouragement to the Communist inspired racial riots." Vendors selling these cheaply printed, single-issue papers have been an institution in Dealey Plaza for some time; the faces and titles change, but the contents remain largely the same. In 1992, Thomas Cruse estimated that he sold "20 to 25 copies" per day of his 20-page paper, *JFK Today*, at three dollars each (Freedenthal, "29 Years"). Mr. James Jones, a sixty-one year old man interviewed in 1991, had been acting as an "unofficial tour guide" in Dealey Plaza for four years, in exchange for voluntary contributions – "We don't beg," Mr. Jones said of himself and his friend Dennis Whitlow. "On a good day, I can make \$35 to \$40 out here" (Brumley). Three blocks away, the privately operated Conspiracy Museum offers an

ideological alternative to the Sixth Floor's appropriation and containment of conspiracy theory.



Fig. 7: Outside the Depository, a vendor displays a souvenir newspaper to a party of tourists (Photo 2001 by Shelley McGinnis.)

As a site of official commemoration, the Sixth Floor is often positioned in opposition to commercial "exploitation." A November, 1992 *Dallas Morning News* editorial asserted that "The Sixth Floor exhibit in the school book depository has allowed thousands of visitors to learn about the slain president and the tragic events of Nov. 22, 1963, without the ugly intrusion of commercialism." The museum should avoid any association with commercialism through "necessary guidelines" that will "serve to protect the rights of those who want and deserve a quiet atmosphere where they can reflect on this sad chapter in American history" ("Sixth Floor"). In 1997, the museum announced the need to raise \$3 million in funds to begin "Phase II" of its

development, which would include placing museum trained "hosts" in Dealey Plaza to "give historically based information to the visitors" (R. Miller). "He wears a Sixth Floor Museum polo shirt and khaki pants, and we make him as official-looking as possible without putting a badge on him," said the museum's executive director Jeff West told *Dallas Morning News* staff writer Robert Miller. "We hope our presence will rid the plaza of most of the conspiracy theorists and others of that kind there." West characterized this as "taking control" of the Plaza, stating that "There are no constitutional means to prevent the conspiracy theorists from offering their personal versions and materials, but under the initiative, they would not be offering those particular versions in a vacuum." West further observed that "many visitors to the plaza area are totally unaware that they're only a few feet from the museum, which partially accounts for the fact that more than 2 million people visit Dealey Plaza a year, but only about a fifth...visit the Sixth Floor Museum," suggesting that one function of the "hosts" would be to steer tourists into the museum (R. Miller).

In the project to construct an appropriate, official public discourse concerning the assassination, conspiracy theory has become linked with commercial exploitation as the inappropriate and unofficial. While the Sixth Floor Exhibit makes reference to the existence of conspiracy belief, it does so in a highly conscripted fashion that leaves it to private entrepreneurs, such as Larry Howard, director of the for-profit Assassination Research Center operating out of the West End Marketplace, to reintroduce the issues that most deeply concern many Dealey Plaza visitors. Responding to an *Esquire* article that called him "the P.T. Barnum of

the conspiracy," Larry Howard asserted, "if I have to be a P.T. Barnum to bring out the truth in this business, I'll do it" (Sumner, "Center Director").

However, Dallasites would soon feel the delicate balance of "appropriate" commemoration achieved by the Museum to be in danger. In January of 1991, a company called Camelot Productions installed itself unnoticed on an empty floor of the old Stoneleigh Hotel. A month later, curiosity and excitement erupted when leaflets appeared advertising an open-call audition for "Oliver Stone's Next Film," seeking not only "Men with Texas Accents, Policemen Types, and Senior Cowboys," but "JFK Motorcade Look-a-likes." Anxiety was immediately expressed over the nature of the film; as Henry Tatum recalls, "Mr. Stone pushed this city's feelings of paranoia to the limit with his secrecy about scripts and the conclusions that his movie would reach" ("Another Stone"). Throughout the production, the *Dallas Morning News's* coverage included concerns expressed over how the film would portray the city. Bill Newman, one of the assassination witnesses who had been consulted by the production company, told the paper that Stone's "attention to detail and historical accuracy" had impressed him, but he remained concerned that "the people of Dallas will be portrayed as a 'bunch of country bumpkins'" (Marvel and Rios). Local artist Sandi Stein, on the other hand, said hopefully that "I trust that Oliver Stone will portray us honestly rather than do a slander job" (Marvel and Rios).

A new set of concerns came to the forefront when it was reported that Stone had approached the Dallas County Historical Foundation with a \$50,000

contribution and a potentially explosive request: to use the sixth floor, recently transformed into the Sixth Floor Exhibit, in filming a reenactment of the Kennedy assassination for a film he was then calling "Project X." Board chair Lindalyn Adams worried that "we had no idea what the script was going to be . . . if we let that floor be used, that would be tantamount to condoning what the film would be about" (Seal, 162). Adams also worried that filming might interfere with the "very delicate and beautifully done exhibit" (Housewright). In a poll, *Dallas Times Herald* readers voted three to two that Stone should be allowed to use the sixth floor. The vote by the foundation was closer – five to four – but also in Stone's favor. Stone next needed and sought permission of the Dallas County Commissioners' Court.

The consternation that the film aroused among city leaders, who cited fear of "exploitation" and disruption to the Sixth Floor exhibit (the legitimate and sanctioned site of historical memory) foregrounds the thin line between stewardship and ownership, commemoration and capitalization. There was in fact a great deal of financial pressure to cooperate with Stone, one source of which came from the state's recent efforts to attract the film industry to the area – efforts which Oliver Stone had greatly assisted in the past by choosing to film parts of *Talk Radio* and *Born on the Fourth of July* there, as the North Texas Film Commission reminded the public (Sumner, "Talking"). Jane Sumner, who wrote a semi-regular column for the *Dallas Morning News* covering filmmaking activity in North Texas, treated the return of "Oliver Stone's shock troops" as a positive development from the start: "After a year without a single full-length feature," she noted in January, "Dallas is stirring

again as a film-making center" ("Stone to Shoot"). During and after the filming, she continued to remind the public of the benefits of Stone's presence, often in terms of cold, hard cash: "When *JFK* moved on to shoot in New Orleans, more than \$3 million remained in the Dallas pipeline. Apply the standard film-making multiplier to that, and it comes to more than an \$11 million infusion...During *JFK*'s four-month stay, merchants from Sunrise Cleaners on Oak Lawn to Deli News in Far North Dallas saw a piece of the action" ("Talking"). Hosting a Hollywood production company also had less tangible payoffs; columnist Alan Peppard wrote in April, "Your statistical chances of bumping into Kevin Costner on the street may be slim, but rest assured he's here. And in certain sectors of the city, he's been prompting pockets of hysteria reminiscent of Beatlemania" ("Stay Alert").

But the Sixth Floor Exhibit itself has to also be seen in the context of a larger project to further develop the tourist potential of the West End district, which, abandoned for years after the assassination in favor of a new, ultramodern downtown, was at this time undergoing a process of gentrification. Dennis Judd has observed that, since the 1980s, strategies for developing urban tourism have included "a well-defined perimeter" that "separates the tourist space from the rest of the city...These become the public parts of town, leaving visitors shielded from and unaware of the private spaces where people live and work" (36). So the "authenticity" that MacCannell describes as the object of sightseeing is refocused from a look into the private spaces of the current city to other forms of authenticity, such as a glimpse into the city's history. Ironically, Dallas's desire to forget the area

where the assassination took place left it ripe for recovery as a tourist enclave thirty-five years later. Older buildings had not been demolished in favor of newer structures, as in many urban downtowns. Turn-of-the-century buildings have now been converted into upscale shops, restaurants, and nightclubs - or into all three, as in the West End Marketplace, a former warehouse that has found new life as an enclosed mall. West End merchants vocally supported Stone, citing the publicity value the film could bring – “We couldn’t have bought that kind of publicity,” Betheny Reid, executive director of the West End Association, declared (Sumner, "Talking").

But the county commissioners were keenly aware that the reclamation of the district was inextricably bound to the recuperation of the assassination, and could not bear the appearance of commercial exploitation of the tragedy. As county judge Lee Jackson phrased it, “I think it would be a tremendous mistake to hang a For Rent sign on the sniper’s perch” (Seal, 162). However, turning Stone away was a dangerous option as well; *D* magazine and *Dallas Morning News* columnist Chris Tucker observed that "when we have a famous person like Oliver Stone come here and focus national attention on the city, people think, 'Let's not do anything to make them think we're a closed, provincial, backward place that killed the president'" (Marvel and Rios). Stone ultimately got everything he wanted: access to the building for nine weeks and permission to refurbish the building with its original colors and signs, as well as permission to shut down the Triple Underpass, a major commuting artery, for several days.

Conservative columnist William Murchison responded with an extraordinary diatribe that resurrected every one of the *Dallas Morning News's* post-assassination "City of Hate" responses. "Oliver Stone, America's favorite anti-American film maker, has downtown traffic tied up while he recreates the Kennedy assassination for an upcoming flick," he wrote. "Why not? The Kennedy assassination has tied up Dallas for 28 years – hogtied, hamstrung, bollixed and bumfuzzled it" (A31). Dallas was a victim of slander: "Not one but two murders occurred at the Triple Underpass. First, a president was slain. Afterward, the character of a whole community was assassinated." Liberals used the assassination to punish Dallas for being conservative: "Dallas, in 1963, was awash in old-time religion and flag-waving patriotism – commodities generally suspect among enlightened liberals." Lee Harvey Oswald was the antithesis of all that Dallas represented: "The city of Dallas bore no guilt whatsoever for the act of an alien loner." Dallas, in Murchison's words, was wrong to be afraid of "offending self-styled victims of racial or sexual 'oppression,'" or, apparently, Oliver Stone. "He gets to block traffic and insult the whole city in his movie because, well, he's a big man, and we wouldn't want such a man thinking ill of Dallas, would we? How tame, how servile and cringing is the spirit of the Old West. How servile and cringing is the spirit of Western civilization in general, if you want the truth."

Most commentators, however, used the filming as an opportunity to claim more positive changes for the city. Columnist Henry Tatum observed that when Dallasites "talk about what Mr. Stone will say about us, they mean back in

California in the film studios, not in his new movie. This involvement ... reflects a healthy growth for Dallas" ("One More Time"). In a later column, Tatum noted proudly that "Oliver Stone received so much help from Dallas city leaders in making his movie that even film producers back in Hollywood were talking about it. They said it was unprecedented for a large city to close down a major downtown traffic artery for days on end...The people of Dallas did a lot of growing up when they set aside their personal fears and helped Oliver Stone make a movie about the most tragic day in this city's history. It is time for the rest of the nation to do the same" ("Another Stone").

By allowing Stone to reenact the assassination for his film, it was widely claimed, city leaders not only showed how far the city had come in recovering from its trauma, but would facilitate the healing process further by, as *Texas Monthly* phrased it, forcing "Dallas to rip open its old wounds and reexamine them" (Seal, 128). Thus the film project was framed positively in the same language of catharsis that had been successfully used in promoting the museum project. City Councilman Al Lipscomb, voicing support for the film, told the *Dallas Times Herald*: "We need a good therapeutic enema...to make sure there will be no residue of the past" (Seal, 133). Marvel and Rios, watching the filming of the re-enactment, write that "as the motorcade makes its way again and again through Dallas streets, hundreds gather to watch, drawn by curiosity and the glamour of movie making. But they also are here to confront that November afternoon, its effect on their lives, its lingering

power to hurt. Will Mr. Stone's movie reopen those wounds? Or will it be a form of therapy, a cathartic event in the long healing process?"

The December 1991 Dallas premiere of *JFK* was a sold-out event for which about 1,000 people paid \$100 a ticket (funds benefiting the Dallas Children's Health Project and Children's Health Fund and the Film Commission of North Texas). For that price ticket buyers attended a special screening at the NorthPark theatre the night before the film opened, followed by a reception at a West End restaurant. In attendance were special guests Oliver Stone, actor Michael Rooker (who played Jim Garrison's assistant Bill Broussard in the film), and former photographer to the Kennedy White House Cecil Stoughton; Marina Oswald Porter was invited but declined to attend. However, the celebrity guests weren't the only attendees with a special relationship to the film; as *Dallas Morning News* columnist Marilyn Schwartz noted, "This was no ordinary audience watching the Dallas premiere of the movie *JFK*. Almost everyone sitting in the theater seemed to have a connection to what was being depicted on the screen." Audience members, who occupied themselves before the screening by sharing stories of their personal connections to the film, included those who had served as extras, caterers, or had supplied props for the sequences of the film that had been shot in Dallas the year before; eyewitnesses to the assassination in 1963; authors and conspiracy theorists devoted to researching the events depicted; and so on down to a woman whose hairdresser "works in the same shop as another hairdresser who styled the hair of the man who plays LBJ" and a man whose "cousin's mother-in-law was once a neighbor of one of the

policemen who interrogated Lee Harvey Oswald.” And, as Bill Marvel noted, “The discussions and debates start even before the final credits roll. They spill over into the parking lot, and probably continue long into the night in kitchens and bedrooms all over the city.”

The December 19th premiere was not in fact the first time that the film had been screened in Dallas. In November, *JFK* had played a very limited engagement to a highly select audience: three Dallas County commissioners and twelve officials of the Dallas County Historical Foundation, who had required a preview of the film as a condition of allowing Oliver Stone to use the Depository building. The county commissioners had insisted on the right to determine whether Stone should be required to add a disclaimer saying that the film was not endorsed by the city of Dallas; commissioner Jim Jackson told *The Dallas Morning News* that he would vote for a disclaimer if the film were “blatantly gory or if they misrepresent the facts” (Belli). While the panel ultimately decided to neither officially endorse the film nor disclaim it, Jackson dryly disclosed to the newspaper that “Oliver Stone certainly had his artistic freedom – freedom of speech – in this film” (Belli).

Throughout the nation, the reception of *JFK* was unusual in the extent to which commenting upon the film was not treated as the exclusive domain of film critics; the opinions of both political pundits and “ordinary” people were as prominently featured in the press. Vivian Sobchack argues that “Popular audiences have become involved in and understand the stakes in historical representation, recognize ‘history in the making,’ and see themselves not only as spectators of

history, but also as participants in and adjudicators of it" (7). A columnist in *The Nation* observed that "Stone's film posited a counterimage to the Warren Commission's findings with such force" that he was able to do "what assassination buffs and conspiratologists of all stripes had previously been unable to do," to bring discussion of conspiracy theory out of the realm of the private and into the public sphere ("Stone's Opening"). One of the major effects of this was to shatter the myth that conspiracy theorists represented a fringe minority in opposition to an official public position, as polls inspired by the film suggested that over eighty percent of the American public had significant doubts about the Warren Commission's findings (Anders, "Finally").

Art Simon writes that debates about the Kennedy assassination marked "a process whereby the state lost authority and whereby its power to control public debated suffered a disruption, even a disintegration. At the same time, and closely related to this disruption, was a similar crisis for the 'official' media and their role as legitimators, their function as supports for the government's claim to interpreting history and current events" (1996: 8). He further claims that

Had the government's account of the assassination gone uncontested and all the subsequent questions never been raised, the case would still have involved a complex process; multiauthored not only by various individuals but by competing government agencies; multilayered in its codification in image and narrative; still constituted by gaps and silences; circulated by the entire field of ideological state apparatuses. The commission critics, however, splintered the forces that mediated the event and the government's account of it. They elevated this

process to a level at which its mechanism of construction, its gaps, silences, contradictions, and representational strategies, became acutely visible. They thereby subjected this history to a radical re-visioning (27).

However, this multivocal mode of historical memory, as Jodi Dean notes, challenges the assumption that "the mainstream, the general populace, the community at large shares a set of common assumptions" (1998: 19). This perceived threat, Dean argues, produces a "fear of conspiracy theory" (2000: 64); "The very prevalence of information and inclusion of multiple voices claimed on behalf of democratic discourse morphs into undecideability of truth claims and the fear that 'all kinds of people' will 'enter the conversation'" (2000: 66). Thus in 1975, Peter Goldman complained in *Newsweek* about conspiracy theorists' "three-Oswald and four-assassin scenarios and their dizzying exegeses of every scrap of paper and every frame of film" (36). Such fears mesh easily with the concept of a gullible public susceptible to media manipulation; thus, an anonymous editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* claimed: "The danger is that Stone's film and the pseudo-history it so effectively portrays will become the popularly accepted version." Brent Staples in the *New York Times* argued that "historical lies are nearly impossible to correct once movies and television have given them credibility... *JFK* is fiction so cunningly disguised that audiences will accept it as fact."

The complex, conspiracy oriented narrative of Stone's film was noted by Dallas observers early in the shooting, despite Stone's secrecy about the content of his script. "The director of the movie *JFK* will use at least five sites from which

gunmen might have shot President John F. Kennedy, according to witness accounts of filming," Weiss reported. Locations of cameras for possible assassin-POV filming included "two on the sixth floor of the old Texas School Book Depository, the infamous grassy knoll, the top of the Dallas County Records Building and – filmed extensively Tuesday – the second floor of the old Dal-Tex building, just east of the depository across Houston Street" (Weiss, "Covering All Angles"). The shoot itself drew many conspiracy theorists. "Strangers stood along Main Street discussing favorite theories, much like baseball fans in the bleachers chewing over statistics from seasons past" (Weiss, "Covering All Angles").

Onlookers compared Stone's staging with what they remembered from photos and films. "'The soldier, he's in the right place,' Mike Hurst pointed out to his wife. Mr. Hurst owns a camera store in Arkansas. The Kennedy assassination is his hobby. 'The soldier' was a man who stood on the grass in 1963 as the presidential motorcade sped by" (Weiss, "1963 Again"). "'I didn't think it was that ornate,'" said Mark Drysdale from Detroit, of the limousine. "'The tire housing didn't look quite the same,' added Russ Lease, a clothing store owner from Maryland. His sister, Peggy Higgins, shrugged, and all three reached into their bags to consult reference books about the assassination" (Weiss, "1963 Again").

Stone's film shoot strengthened and, to an extent, legitimated Dallas's position as a "Mecca" for conspiracy theorists.⁵ *Texas Monthly* remarked that

⁵ Bob Groden, known for using his frame-by-frame analysis of the Zapruder film to argue that that fatal bullet came from in front, not behind Kennedy, says that Dealey Plaza is "Mecca for people like me" (Trejo).

“Conspiracy buffs have trundled into town [to view the filming] as if headed to a convention” (Seal, 131). Schwartz noted at the premiere that “at the concession stand, assassination theories were being dished up faster than popcorn.” The release of *JFK* in 1990 was followed by marked increase in tourism to Dallas and Dealey Plaza. By August of 1991, yearly attendance was 378,501, while the three previous years averaged about 300,000 for the entire year (Lee). Bob Hayes of the Dallas County Historical Foundation said that an "initial surge ... on the heels of *JFK's* release" was expected; "what wasn't expected was that the numbers would go up and stay up" (Bass). In fact, even in the months before the film's release, publicity surrounding the shooting was showing an effect; "In June, immediately after the filming, the exhibit attracted about 5,000 more visitors than the previous June...Over at Larry Howard's JFK Assassination Information Center in the West End MarketPlace, business has tripled' (Sumner, "Talking").

Shortly after the movie's release, Dan Barber interviewed a twenty-four-year-old man from Kansas City, Missouri, who said that he hadn't yet seen the film, but "All the publicity now going on kind of makes you think," inspiring him to visit the exhibit with his mother for the first time. The young man stated that "he has considered visiting the exhibit since it opened but never took the time to stop. The movies, television shows and public demands for release of government records regarding the assassination changed his mind. 'It kind of kicks you in the butt,' he said"(A33). Bob Hayes reported that "exhibit-goers are airing complaints about the investigation of the Kennedy assassination" in the memory books; "'Before, there

were comments about honoring the memory of President Kennedy,' Mr. Hayes said. 'Now, people are writing a lot more about their dissatisfaction over not knowing, and maybe not ever being able to know what really happened" (Wilson).

Jodi Dean writes that the "ideal" of the public sphere depends upon the reification of reason; this "common rationality is the standard by which deviations, irrationalities, are judged, through which exclusions are not only effected but discerned. Differences end up deposited onto some set of others, onto unfamiliar strangers" (1998: 16). Therefore, dominant discourse tends to marginalize conspiracy theory through such tactics as pathologization, which consign it to the realm of the irrational. This discursive strategy is frequently encountered in the Dallas press, which articulates a pronounced ambivalence about the city's status as the "Mecca" of conspiracy theorists.

Reporting on the Assassination Symposium held in 1991 at the Hyatt Regency, Tom Maurstad describes the three hundred attendees as "a banquet hall's worth of people whose common experience would seem to be that each has cleared the room at a party" ("Obsession"). He goes on to suggest that the conference "is like any other celebration of fascination. People congregate to endlessly scrutinize minutiae, whether it be the homoerotic subtext of Kirk's relationship with Spock or bullet trajectories leading to the grassy knoll." However, Maurstad also quotes symposium attendee Bob Harris, a 28 year old comedian from Cleveland, who says, "It's a shame that when citizens see something that they feel they need to become involved in, they're automatically categorized as kooks and nuts. It tells you how

horribly deteriorated our sense of democracy and individual responsibility is in this country."

Michael Warner suggests that

Public discourse postulates a circulatory field of estrangement that it must then struggle to capture as an addressable entity. No form with such a structure could be very stable. The projective character of public discourse, in which each characterization of the circulatory path becomes material for new estrangements and recharacterizations, is an engine for (not-necessarily progressive) social mutation (2002: 113).

Counterpublics, which arise as a response to the limitations of "the public," are created by and for those "marked off from persons or citizens in general," and are defined by their tensions with a larger public" (56). Conspiracy theorists represent a counterpublic that interprets its own focus on the JFK assassination with a concern for the state of participatory democracy. Tom Bowden, president of Dallas's Conspiracy Museum, which opened in 1995, explains, "We want people to think. We want them to realize that there are other sides to the story" (Yearwood). Dallas assassination researcher Penn Jones says, "my life was never the same after that day. The country was never the same. Democracy died that day in Dealey Plaza." For conspiracy believers like Jones, Kennedy and his assassins represent the two sides of government, characterized by Buck-Morss as the democratic "civil state" and those covert agents who violate "every democratic right in the name of protecting democracy" (21). Penn Jones's son told Kathryn Jones, "I think it became even more

personal because of whom he felt was responsible (the government). He felt betrayed, personally by the country and the ideals he had fought for. He never got over it" (K. Jones, "Skeptic's Lot").

So, "with no higher authority to turn to," as Maurstad observes, "these 'independent investigators' have deputized themselves" ("Obsession"). Michael Warner argues that "in the dominant tradition of the public sphere, address to a public is ideologized as rational-critical dialogue;" this "ideolization enables the idea that publics can have volitional agency: they exist to deliberate and then decide" (2002: 115). For those who believe in conspiracy, a visit to the site of the assassination is a chance to visualize what might or might not have happened, as a precursory step to drawing their own conclusions. As Penn Jones told fellow researcher Robert Chapman, "You can't understand this case until you take the tour" (Chapman).

Flick notes, "many of the ordinary people who come to Dealey Plaza say they do so in order to mentally test assassination theories. 'We're trying to live it out for ourselves,' said Mike Travis, 25, of Pittsburgh, who visited the site last week with his wife. After walking the grounds, he pronounced himself still undecided" ("Grief"). Dillon noted that "Dealey Plaza is one of the most photographed and scrutinized public spaces in America," attracting those who "draw the trajectory of the fatal bullet in the air with their fingers. Many carry yellowed photographs from the 1960s, trying to match the present with the past, and seizing on any discrepancies with the zeal of private investigators." Dillon says that "this familiarity continues to

draw half a million visitors a year, seeking to confirm their own mental images of the event.”



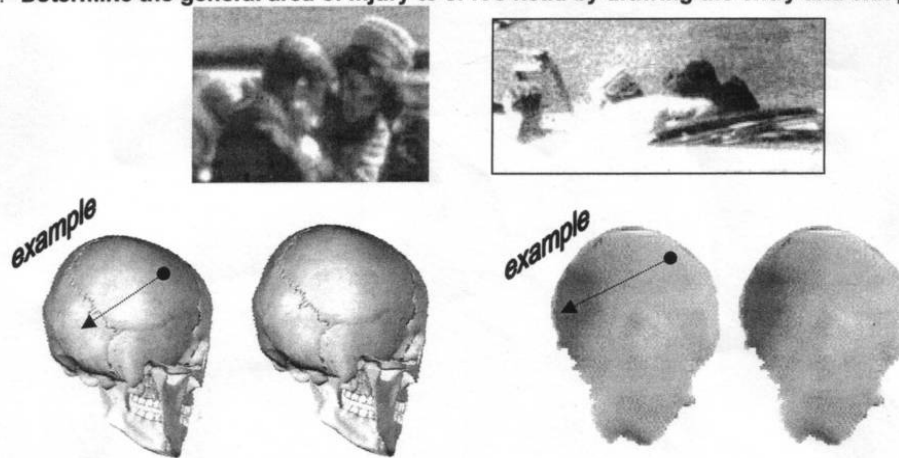
Fig. 8: Assassination researchers investigate a manhole on Elm Street from which they speculate shots might have been fired (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis)

Many who visit look for media-familiar vantage points and conspiracy theory hot spots. Tom Herrera, a visitor from California on the assassination's 28th anniversary, took pictures from the "Zapruder spot" and then told the *Dallas Morning News*, 'In a few minutes, I want to go back behind the picket fence and take a few shots from there' (Real, "Hundreds"). In 1998, a *Morning News* reporter noted a man "wearing a Florida Gators gimme cap" standing behind the fence at the back of the grassy knoll, who "bent his arms as if aiming a rifle down Elm Street" (Trejo). This investigatory narrative can be so compelling that it encroaches upon the narratives of catharsis

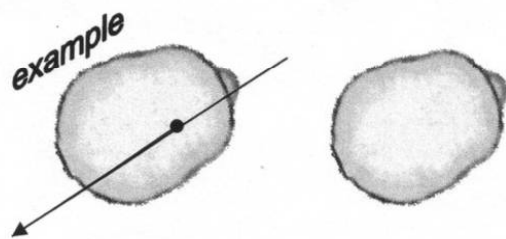
and commemoration. Robin Doussard, in her emotional account of visiting the Sixth Floor exhibit, includes this somewhat startling observation: "Few speak. There are long gazes out the adjacent windows, over to the grassy knoll. Some kneel. Some lift their children into their arms and, heads together, estimate the path the bullets must have taken, explaining that is was down there, in Dealey Plaza, that the nation lost its young president."

At the 2003 "November in Dallas" conference sponsored by JFK Lancer, an assassination research group centered in Dallas, the following two pages were given to every attendee with the conference registration packet. They represent a striking example of the Do-It-Yourself attitude toward investigation that characterizes the discourse of conspiracy theory (note the emphasis on finding "*your* best estimate" of the trajectories of bullets in relation to Kennedy's injuries).

1. Determine the general area of injury to JFK's head by drawing the entry and exit points.



2. Determine where the possible angles of trajectory are located in relation to the wounds by drawing a line through the entry and exit points. This line should be from an overhead viewpoint.



3. Locate JFK's head within the vehicle and determine what direction he was facing in relation to the limousine by drawing a line extending beyond the vehicle edge.

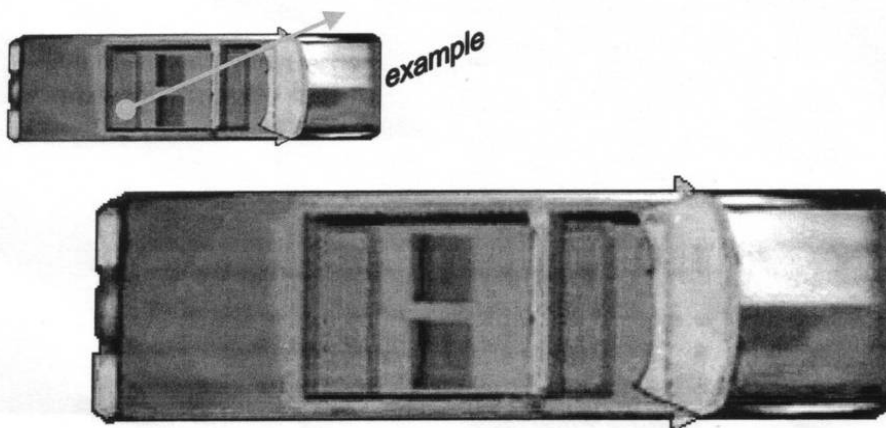
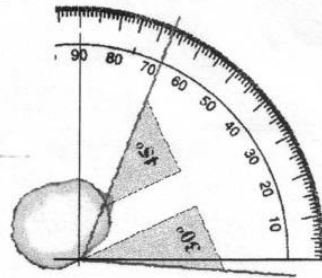
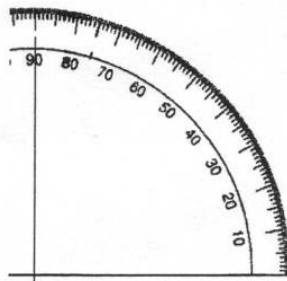
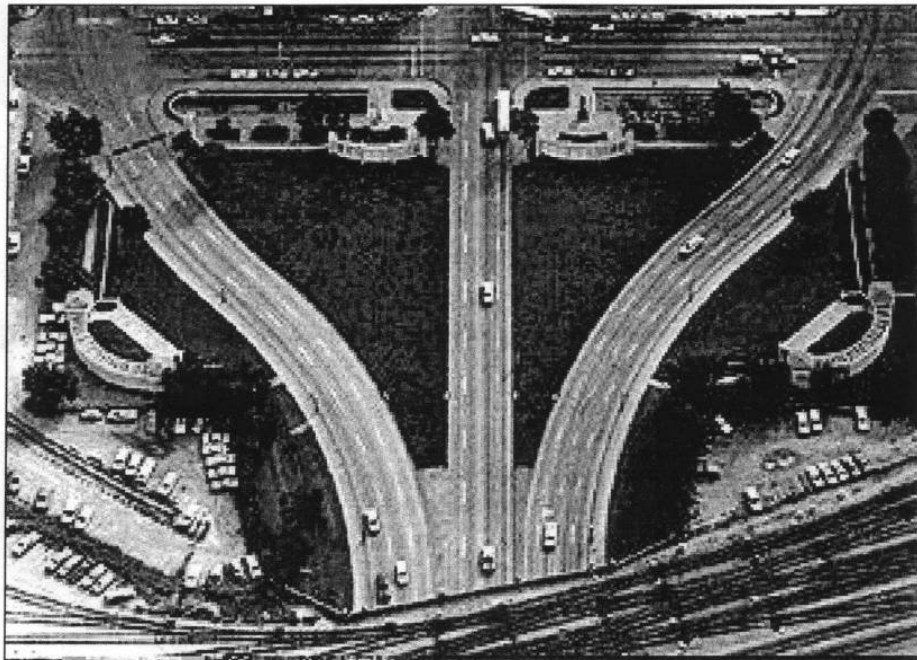


Fig. 9: Page one of a 2003 assassination conference handout (courtesy JFK Lancer)

4. Determine what areas within Dealy Plaza were exposed to the front quadrant of the head at the time of the injury. Use the compass to assure you have the correct angle of possible trajectories.



5. On your handout approximate the location of the limousine at the time of the head shot. Then draw a line indicating the direction the vehicle was headed or pointing on the map below. Place the point of the cut out triangle on the location you believe JFK was located in Dealy Plaza.



You have now indicated the only possible locations for the shooter using **your** best estimates of where the injuries, vehicle and head are located.

Fig. 10: Page two of a 2003 assassination conference handout (courtesy JFK Lancer)

Michael Warner prefers to work with the concepts of a "public" or "counterpublic" rather with the commonly used term "community." A public is composed of, and creates imaginary relations among, strangers; thus "public" is a more accurate term for describing the mediated, "reflexive circulation of discourse" (2002: 90) that defines modern social life than "community." But as some of the above accounts suggest, many conspiracy theorists find that a second benefit of the "pilgrimage" to Dallas is the opportunity to meet and talk face-to-face with like-minded individuals. In 1990, Doug Beers, a Ft. Worth postal worker and amateur assassination researcher, told the *Morning News*, "You're here with people with similar interests, and you just talk about it and exchange ideas." Beers believes that "movers and shakers high up in business and government" were behind the assassination. "It was no one you can name. The people who really run this country" (Nather). The following year, Jeffery Weiss interviewed Mark Drysdale and Peggy Higgins, a brother and sister from Detroit, and their friend, Russ Lease from Maryland, who met "for the first time when they came to Dallas for the 25th anniversary of the assassination. They had run into each other on the fifth floor of the old depository, trying to find a way to get to the sixth floor. 'We have it all on video,' Ms. Higgins said. They stayed in touch ever since" (Weiss, "1963 Again").

Dallas is also home to some two-dozen committed assassination researchers, such as Dave Perry, who relocated from Massachusetts after visiting Dallas in 1983, and has "spent thousands of dollars and countless hours interviewing witnesses and conducting his personal investigation" (Real, "JFK Buffs"). Penn Jones, the

former editor of the daily paper of Midlothian, Texas, "was among a small group of dissidents who early on raised questions about the president's murder. The group included Mark Lane, Harold Weisberg, Sylvia Meagher, Mary Ferrell, Josiah Thompson and Gary Shaw. As they learned they were not alone, they began talking to – and disagreeing with – each other" (K. Jones, "Skeptic's Lot"). Jim Marrs, the author of *Crossfire: The Plot that Killed Kennedy*, began teaching an adult education course – through the University of Texas at Arlington – introducing students to assassination research in 1976. In 1984, he added a second class, the "JFK Advanced Studies Group," which attracted a core group of participants who enrolled every semester for the nine years that the course was offered. Mary Ferrell, known in the "research community" for her extensive collection of assassination books and documents, is also known for her willingness to share her materials with both established and aspiring researchers. "We have to have the young people because we've got to leave what we have to them and hope that they will continue it," she told the *Morning News* in 1990. "These very bright young people really have great hopes that they will be the one to solve it – and so do I" (Real, "JFK Buffs").

In 1994, Larry Powell opened a column with the declaration that "Yes, it is autumn all over Dallas, and two things are certain: There'll be geese in the air and JFK loons on the local pond." But he immediately qualifies with:

Oh, that 'loon' crack will catch some heat, but, trust me, there are loons associated with the study of the events of Nov. 22, 1963. But there are also serious students of

alleged shortcomings of the investigation. So you can't pin the loon label on the whole busload ("Look Up").

In this chapter I have traced an evolution of discourses surrounding the JFK assassination and its representation. But this chronicle should not be understood as one discourse replacing another in a clean, linear fashion. Each November 22, the anniversary of the assassination, shows a cumulative accretion of discourses in circulation in some form. In 2003, on the 40th anniversary, an almost ritualistic letter to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News* stated:

'Will Dallas ever shake the Kennedy stigma?' says the Thursday front page. Answer: Real simple – forget about it and stop bringing it up each year...Had John F. Kennedy done as his Secret Service people wanted and used a secure, safe car...the whole event would never have happened...it is the media and your newspaper that keep bringing these things up.

In spite of the persistence of the position articulated by the letter writer above, however, the anniversary observances in Dallas have grown in both size and notice. In 1969, the "coming of fall six years later brings only an occasional visitor to Dealey Plaza" (Geddie). In 1985, the "day in Dallas history that most people would rather forget lured a handful of assassination buffs, tourists and politicians to Dealey Plaza" (Bedell). In 1990, Dealey Plaza drew about thirty people, "standing on the grassy knoll, pointing at various spots where the shots might have been fired" (Nather). The following year, the 28th anniversary, which took place after the filming but before the release of *JFK*, saw "more than 400 people" in Dealey Plaza.

"Extras from *JFK*, the soon-to-be-released movie by Oliver Stone, milled about. Assassination buffs traded theories (Real, "Hundreds"). In 1992, Kathryn Jones said that "the scene at Dealey Plaza looks like a sideshow," as "Street vendors hawk hot dogs, soft drinks, and JFK memorabilia. Assassination buffs argue about What Really Happened. Tourists pose for pictures on the grassy knoll" ("Skeptic's Lot").

In 2003, the 40th anniversary, an estimated 5,000 people assembled in Dealey Plaza. The city's contribution to the observance was to close off several blocks of Houston and Elm streets on Saturday morning, so that the crowd could move freely from the Plaza to the Depository to the Triple Underpass. JFK Lancer set up a soundstage in the colonnade next to the grassy knoll for a series of hosted speakers, including former Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura. David Flick observed that the crowd showed "less emotion than curiosity...Many people stand around watching other people stand around" ("City"). I was among those "watching other people stand around," and what's more, listening to people talk:

"My father was in the Navy – when I was five, he held me to meet Kennedy, and a couple of weeks later he was dead."

"Johnson kept his mouth shut about what he knew. He might as well pulled the trigger. I believe that with all my heart."

"One thing about that movie, it did get a whole new generation interested."



Fig. 11: November 22, 2003. A crowd gathers at the Triple Underpass to observe the 40th anniversary of the assassination (Photo by Shelley McGinnis.)

I mentioned at the start of this chapter being intrigued by the idea of Dealey Plaza as a site of public expression and discussion, and throughout this chapter we have seen local civic leaders and media commentators attempt to define what sort of expression and discussion constitutes a proper engagement with the most politically and emotionally fraught topic in the city's history, with language evoking catharsis and commemoration ultimately replacing defensive disavowal and silence as the dominant discourse, while the questions and doubts raised by conspiracy theorists continue to be frequently cast as suspect and aligned with the forces of exploitation. But as seen in the comments cited above, this divide is far less visible in the

discourse of visitors, who are frequently concerned with both honoring and questioning, commemoration and investigation. And, in fact, for the conspiracy believer such as Penn Jones, for whom “democracy died that day in Dealey Plaza,” questioning *is* honoring, not just Kennedy but the ideals that he represents to Jones.

I would like to close my discussion of Dealey Plaza with a description of an encounter that strikingly illustrates this sort of complex response to the site, as well as demonstrating how the gathering of such a public in such a site can create an impulse to speak that is so strong it requires very little prompting. On the Saturday of Nov. 22, 1993, as I stood amidst the crowd near the retaining wall where Zapruder shot his film of the assassination, watching members of the "JFK Japan" club take turns standing in the "Zapruder spot," I noticed a tree that I thought had grown considerably in the past forty years. I turned to the closest person, an African-American man of late middle age, and asked, “Do you know what sort of tree that is? Is it a live oak?” He glanced at the tree and replied, “I believe so,” and then continued:

Weather just like that day. Windy. Cleared up about 10 o'clock. You probably weren't even born then. Well, you're doing the right thing, learning about it. Man who worked at that train station back there – he saw smoke right there [pointing toward the grassy knoll]. I saw that in the Warren report.

They killed the man, but they can't kill the dream. I feel him, his spirit is strong. He's looking down right now. He knows what happened, it's already discovered, just Man doesn't know. JFK started it, it's up to us to finish it.

Us and the Man upstairs. Give something back – that's what I'm doing here.

Chapter 3: “A Great Thing for the UFOs and the Community:” UFO Tourism in Roswell, New Mexico

In 1996, two recent college graduates, Matthew Holm and Jon Follett, decided to spend their vacation on a tour of various sites associated with UFOs. Their travels inevitably brought them to one of the “milestones or big stories of UFO history” (2): Roswell, New Mexico, where in 1947 the United States military officially, albeit briefly, proclaimed the reality of “flying saucers.” After visiting the town’s two UFO museums, Holm and Follett set out for “the crash site,” but decided about thirty miles outside town “that (1) it’s pretty far to the site, and (2) there’s probably nothing there anyway” (100). As a visitor to a number of the same sites toured by Holm and Follett, I find their decision surprising, given their overall project; UFO sites are commonly characterized by both remoteness and a lack of anything much to actually see. As I will further elaborate in Chapter 5, this is one of the things that makes UFO tourism closer in spirit and practice to pilgrimage than to conventional sightseeing. In fact, “the crash site” north of Roswell has more “there” than most; as Steve Britton, whose work on the “geography of development” in the South Pacific raises many translatable points, suggests about tourist sites in general, “Many attractions are unrecognizable as such except for one crucial element – the

markers: these are any information or representation that labels a site as a sight” (1991: 463); and the site in question is quite thoroughly marked.

I find myself placing “the crash site” in quotation marks because the half-dozen men who have spent years researching the possibility of a 1947 UFO crash in the area disagree about the precise location, or locations, where UFO wreckage might have been found.



Fig. 12: A sign on Highway 285 north of Roswell alerts travelers to the opportunity to visit one of several local UFO crash sites (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

The location on the map which Holm and Follett obtained in the museum gift shop is in fact only one of the possibilities – a bit of ranchland identified in the early 1990s by a former air force staff sergeant, Frank Kaufmann, as the place from which the military retrieved a wrecked spacecraft and five extraterrestrial corpses. For

many tourists, however, it is *the* crash site; its owner, rancher Hub Corn, has marked it as such. Amidst the scrub, a stone bears this inscription:

*We don't know who they were
We don't know why they came
We only know they changed our view of the universe*

*This universal sacred site is dedicated July 1997 to the beings
who met their destinies near Roswell, New Mexico, July 1947*

Several simple stone obelisks contribute to the hallowed ambience, while nearby, an American flag marks the spot where Kaufmann claimed to have seen the body of a strangely beautiful being with a “damned serene look on its face ... like it was at peace with the world” (Randle and Schmitt, *Truth*, 12).

The patriotic touch represented by the flag strikes a somewhat incongruous note, not merely because it seems at odds with the universalism expressed by the marker, but because it uncomfortably calls to mind the narrative that propels many visitors to seek out the spot in the first place. Roswell, New Mexico, former military town, civic award-winning “All-American City,” has become the locus of a congeries of counter-histories, myths and pop culture products, all of which place the United States military and government at the heart of a conspiracy to keep from the nation’s citizens the answers to what some consider “the biggest story of the millennium” (Friedman, *Flying Saucers*) – the answers to those very questions inscribed on the marker, “who they were” and “why they came.” The story of the “Roswell incident” is a narrative that explicitly critiques the “wild zone” in which the

power of the United States government operates "out of control of the masses, veiled from public scrutiny, arbitrary and absolute" (Buck-Morss, 2002: 2).



Fig. 13: Downtown Roswell store window (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

The story in this chapter is of the intersection of two histories. One is the history of the town of Roswell, a Western agricultural town that grew into a small city after the construction of a military base and which, after the base closed, was faced with the challenge of rebuilding its economy and creating a new community identity. The other is the history of "ufology," a diverse, amateur field of study concerned with researching and documenting encounters with or evidence of UFOs, a field that draws upon but at the same time challenges accepted standards of scientific authority and credibility. These two histories briefly intersected in July of

1947, when the United States Air Force made a quickly-retracted announcement that a “flying saucer” had been recovered by Air Force personnel stationed at Roswell. They would intersect again, and become much more deeply and lastingly intertwined, when ufologists began to research and publicize the “Roswell incident” again in the late 1970s, and as Roswell’s residents gradually began to consider the possible advantages such publicity could bring to the community. The result was a number of UFO-themed attractions in Roswell – most notably, the now-defunct UFO Enigma museum that local video store owner John Price began operating out of his store in the late 1980s, and the still-flourishing International UFO Museum and Research Center in downtown Roswell. The story of these two museums reveals a great deal about the disparate attitudes Roswell’s citizens and civic leaders held toward their “UFO legacy” in the first decade after the “Roswell incident’s” rediscovery. A second result is the annual “UFO Festival” held every July since 1995 in Roswell – an event organized by promoters who worked hard to overcome the perceived stigma of “weirdness” attached to the subject matter both by emphasizing a playful, “fun” attitude toward UFOs and by linking support of UFO tourism explicitly to ideals of civic duty and community.

Like many Western cities, Roswell began life in the nineteenth century as a trading post. It was named after Roswell Smith (the father of Van Smith, who in 1873 built the post office around which the town arose), and became an agricultural center as the state was increasingly settled by cattle ranchers and irrigation farmers. In the 1940s, the Roswell Army Air Field was built, and became the home of the

nation's atomic warfare unit – the 509th Bomb Wing – and the B-29 bomber “Enola Gay.” As in most base towns, the military presence became a major factor in the town's economic growth and maintenance, and when the base closed in 1967, “parts of Roswell became ghost towns as thousands made their exodus. Roswell's economy collapsed” (E. Fleming, 10-11). The town did not die, however; it began a long slow struggle to rebuild its economy on a different, more diversified foundation. The base facilities were given to the city, and converted to a commercial airport, an industrial center, and a community college (which later became a branch campus of Eastern New Mexico University). City leaders adopted and promoted strategies to attract businesses, retirees, and tourists. While economic incentives were aimed at the former two categories, to attract the latter, some sort of unique identity was desired, and some began to consider the market value of a unique bit of history that Roswell possessed: in July of 1947, the Roswell Army Air Field had been the source of an official announcement – the only such in American history – that the army had recovered a crashed “flying saucer.”

World War II saw a rise in sightings of unidentified objects in the sky. Fighter pilots reported being followed by strange lights that they called “foo fighters;” in Northern Europe, there were reports of “ghost rockets.” Both were commonly attributed to unknown enemy technology (Clark, 67). Beginning in June of 1947, a rash of sightings of strange aerial objects across the United States provoked speculation about both secret Soviet technology and possible extraterrestrial visitation. On June 24th, Kenneth Arnold, small businessman and

amateur pilot, was flying his light plane in Washington state when he spotted nine unknown craft flying in formation over Mount Rainer at phenomenally high speeds. In telling his story to reporters, he compared the objects to saucers, and "Soon afterwards an anonymous headline writer in the Pacific Northwest coined the phrase 'flying saucer'" (Clark, 66). That summer, "thousands of similar reports were recorded in the next few weeks as speculation about the mystery of the saucers exploded...Some were simply strange lights in the night sky, but most of the sightings were of 'daylight discs' that gave every impression of being structured craft of some kind, though they often moved at 'impossible' speeds or executed manoeuvres that no human pilot could match" (Dash, 133).

On July 8, evening papers west of Chicago went to press with a new twist on the flying saucer story, courtesy of the following press release:

The many rumors regarding the flying discs became a reality yesterday when the Intelligence Office of the 509th Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc, through the cooperation of one of the local ranchers and the Sheriff's Office of Chaves County. The flying object landed on a ranch near Roswell sometime last week. Not having phone facilities, the rancher stored the disc until such time as he was able to contact the Sheriff's Office, who, in turn, notified Major Jesse A. Marcel of the 509th Bomb Group Intelligence Office.

This announcement was dictated by Col. Blanchard, commanding officer of the Roswell Army Air Field, to the base's public relations officer, Walter G. Haut. Haut distributed the release to two local newspapers and two radio stations, and

KSWS program director George Walsh phoned the announcement in to the Associated Press bureau in Albuquerque, which sent a reporter and wire-photo technician to Roswell to pursue the story (Pflock, 27). The local media outlets, sheriff's office, and the base itself were deluged with calls from all over the country, and Walsh says that Haut told him later that day, "I got a call from the War Department that told me to shut up" (Pflock 27). The material recovered from the ranch – not as suggested by the press release an intact "disc" that had "landed," but wreckage or debris of some kind – was flown to the Eighth Air Force headquarters in Ft. Worth, Texas, where the following day a press conference was held.

Commanding officer General Roger Ramey told the assembled press that the material had been positively identified as the remains of a weather balloon. "The wreckage is in my office right now and as far as I can see there is nothing to get excited about," he is reported as saying in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of July 9. Ramey and intelligence officer Jesse Marcel were photographed with pieces of foil-like debris, and newspapers across the country humorously dismissed the Air Force base's amazing find. The headline of that day's *Roswell Daily Record* phrased it succinctly: "Gen. Ramey Empties Roswell Saucer." Interviewed in 1992, Walter Haut said he believed that the weather balloon announcement was "part of a finely tuned cover-up," but that the matter "wasn't pursued because the news media is not as pushy as it is today" ("UFO Incident," 1). Except for a brief mention in Frank Edwards's 1966 book *Flying Saucers – Serious Business*, the incident was largely forgotten – even by those most interested in the subject of flying saucers, which in

the 1950s also came to be known by the Air Force term “unidentified flying objects,” or “UFOs” (Clark, 66).

“After 1947,” Mike Dash writes, “there would be years when little seemed to happen, and investigators puzzled over a sharp decline in reports, but flying saucers entered the public consciousness in the wake of Arnold’s report and have remained there ever since” (133-134).

A year or two later, the growing band of civilian enthusiasts began to form themselves into ‘flying saucer clubs’ and to conduct their own investigations. During the 1950s and 1960s, in an attempt to distance themselves from their naïve origins, the surviving clubs began to give themselves serious-sounding names- the two largest were NICAP, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, which pressed for Congressional hearings into the mystery, and APRO, the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization – and the saucer buffs took to calling themselves ‘ufologists.’ The new subject nevertheless remained an amateur pursuit, and the standard of investigation varied from the competent to the extremely credulous (Dash, 136).

Jodi Dean argues that while “the military monopolized all information about saucer reports,” the task of finding and “analyzing evidence under these conditions turned the question of the truth of UFOs into a question of the proper extent of state authority and the proper role of military experts” (1998: 35); she further suggests that as “expert knowledge conflicted directly with ‘the people’s right to know,’ ufology emerged as a sort of advocacy group. On behalf of the ‘people,’ they challenged the limits to and criteria for government secrecy” (1998: 35). Ufology emerged under these conditions as what John Fiske terms a “counterknowledge,”

constructed from “purloined” “bits of official knowledge,” that have been “disarticulated from it and rearticulated into a counter way of knowing, where their significance is quite different” (1996: 191). The divergence between “official” and “amateur” investigations of UFOs was fully established by 1949, when air force investigations were handled under the code name Project Grudge – by personnel who, in the belief that UFO hysteria might be exploited by communist subversives, actively sought to downplay and discredit UFO reports. As Dean notes, this aggressively dismissive approach often had a “reverse effect” on the amateur investigators, strengthening “suspicions that there really was something to hide” (1998: 36).

A second effect of these conflicting interests upon the emerging field of “ufology” was a strong concern with re-establishing the credibility that Project Grudge sought to strip away, through an emphasis on the character of witnesses, a rigorous scientific approach to evidence gathering, and a disavowal of any claims that seemed too “far out” – as Dean says, “during the Cold War, the need for credibility kept those who considered themselves serious ufologists at a distance from the contactees” (1998: 46), people who believed or claimed they had had actual contact or communication with extraterrestrials. This began to change in the 1960s, however, as high-profile cases of reported “alien abduction,” such as that of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961, and that of Travis Walton in 1975, began to increasingly attract interest; the concept of (in the terminology of ufologist J. Allen Hynek) “close encounters of the third kind,” which involve sightings of or contact with alien

beings, was becoming less disreputable to “serious” researchers. Ufology resurfaced quite visibly in popular culture in 1979, with the release of Steven Spielberg’s enormously successful movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the very title of which draws upon subcultural jargon. The plot intercuts the adventures of its main protagonists – “ordinary people” in Indiana whose lives are transformed by an extraordinary series of UFO sightings – with the activities of a group of ufologists, who travel the world collecting evidence which they present at a conference, as well as with scenes involving air force representatives who try to “cover up” the UFO activity – dismissing reports and inventing a dangerous gas leak to evacuate residents from an area where UFOs are visiting.

In this context, the largely forgotten incident at Roswell Army Air Field was ripe for rediscovery. One day in 1978, while physicist and UFO lecturer Stanton Friedman was waiting to be interviewed at a television station in Baton Rouge, La., the station manager told him that “the person you really ought to talk to is Jesse Marcel. He handled pieces of one of those things” (Berliner and Friedman, 8). Marcel had retired to Houma, Louisiana, and become friendly with the station manager via a shared interest in ham radio. Friedman recalls that “in 1978 claims of the recovery of crashed saucers bordered on the disreputable,” so he was uncertain how seriously to take this recommendation; he did get in touch with Marcel, though, and thought he “sounded straightforward” (ibid, 9). Marcel described the wreckage he had seen as “unusual and thoroughly unrecognizable,” with “short lengths of I-beam with odd symbols along the web” (ibid, 10). Marcel said that he had been

ordered by General Ramey “not to say anything,” even though he knew the material “sure wasn’t part of a weather balloon” (ibid, 11).

In February of 1979, Friedman’s colleague William Moore found in the University of Minnesota library some original newspaper clippings from 1947 that verified the basics of the story Marcel had told. The two ufologists felt that a “one-time intelligence officer of an elite Army Air Forces unit was exactly the sort of firsthand witness who could propel the story of the crash into the history books” (Berliner and Friedman, 15), and began trying to track down the other names mentioned in the articles – such as rancher Mack Brazel and public relations officer Walter Haut – or any other possible witnesses, “using the sadly limited resources available at this stage of the game” (ibid). Friedman interviewed Marcel for his 1979 documentary, *UFOs Are Real*, alongside more recent sensations, abductees Betty Hill and Travis Walton; and the research and testimony-gathering of Friedman and Moore were the basis for a 1980 book, *The Roswell Incident*, written by Moore with Charles Berlitz. This book uses testimony from almost 100 interviews to argue that the weather balloon explanation was a cover story concocted to hide the fact that an extraterrestrial spacecraft had crashed northwest of Roswell. The authors also interviewed friends of a deceased archaeologist who had told them of seeing a crashed saucer and alien corpses in a canyon to the west of the Foster ranch, where the known debris was found. This introduces the popular theory of a two-saucer crash. This book contains most of the elements that still define the “Roswell Incident” for UFO enthusiasts today: witnesses’ accounts of seeing and handling the

debris, which is described as exhibiting highly unusual properties (extremely lightweight, yet seemingly indestructible by ordinary means); stories of military officials using persuasion or intimidation to silence witnesses; speculation about CIA involvement and theories about the top-secret uses being made of the recovered UFO technology.

In 1979, Jesse Marcel was also interviewed by Bob Pratt for the *National Enquirer*, which reintroduced the Roswell incident to a broader audience. "The story unleashed a torrent of tabloid articles, books, and television programs, most espousing a dark conspiracy theory" (Jerome, 94). Andrew Stuttaford suggested in 1995 that "events in Washington, D.C., a few years earlier had left people all too willing to believe in a 'cosmic Watergate'" (28), presaging and reinforcing Peter Knight's claim that "Since the revelations during the mid-1970s in the wake of Watergate about the conspiratorial activities of government agencies, a priori dismissals of conspiracy theory have become less tenable for many Americans" (2000: 10).

Jerome Clark writes that:

Though the Roswell incident itself seemed, if impossible to resolve, certainly genuinely puzzling, it carried with it a host of questionable claims. Moore reported that his investigation of the Roswell incident brought him into contact with cover-up insiders within military and civilian intelligence agencies. These individuals, to whom he assigned various avian pseudonyms and whom he dubbed "the birds" (Falcon, Condor, Sparrow, and so on), related fantastic tales not only of spaceship crashes

but of face-to-face contact between aliens and U.S. government representatives (82).

Most notorious of the material produced by Moore, as purportedly leaked in 1984 by these shadowy contacts, and published in 1987, is the “MJ-12” or “Majestic-12” document – ostensibly part of a brief written for President Dwight D. Eisenhower, informing him of top-secret researches involving recovered UFO technology and alien bodies. Although held in considerable doubt by many ufologists (some of whom consider MJ-12 a hoax, others of whom believe it to be deliberately leaked disinformation meant to distract and discredit UFO studies), the claims made in the document, which suggested a much larger and more labyrinthine conspiracy than had initially been associated with the Roswell incident, would reappear many times in the following years in both serious UFO studies and popular culture texts. Information about the MJ-12 document reached a broad public through *News and Comment*, the popular radio program hosted by Paul Harvey on the ABC Radio Network. Harvey became interested after being contacted by Moore, and publicly called for anyone with any knowledge of the matter to come forward (Price, *Roswell*, 38).

After these early spurts of publicity, other witnesses appeared with even more remarkable stories to tell. By the end of the 1980s, more than three hundred sources had been interviewed by ufologists (Clark, 82). In 1989, the television series *Unsolved Mysteries*, with research assistance from Stanton Friedman, ran a segment on the Roswell incident which featured dramatic reenactments of a saucer crash and

organized military action to control and contain the knowledge of it. The episode, which aired September 20, 1989, gave a telephone number for those with further information to get in touch with Friedman; those that did include Robert F. Smith, a former Air Force sergeant who told of loading mysterious sealed crates aboard a secret flight from the Roswell base to Los Alamos (Pflock, 106). Around that same time, Friedman first interviewed Glenn Dennis, who in 1947 was working at a Roswell funeral home and had several strange experiences to relate. He claims to have visited the base the afternoon of July 7th, 1947, where he saw some of the wreckage and was ordered to keep quiet about it by an officer, who threatened, "Somebody will be picking your bones out of the sand" (Dennis, 3). Before leaving he encountered a nurse of his acquaintance, who was crying and appeared ill. He met with her later, and she told him that she had assisted at the autopsies of three alien bodies, which she described as small, with four-fingered hands, no ear or nose cartilage, and very large skulls and eyes.

In 1991, an updated version encapsulated these new developments: *UFO Crash at Roswell*, by Kevin Randle and Donald R. Schmitt. The version of events argued for in this book largely builds upon Moore and Berlitz's, elaborated by the testimony of Frank Kaufmann, another new witness who claimed to have seen a crashed saucer and alien bodies firsthand. Stanton Friedman co-wrote (with Don Berliner) his own account, *Crash at Corona*, in 1992, which incorporates Glenn Dennis's story and discusses the validity of the MJ-12 documents, concluding that if "Majestic-12 never existed, then another group with about the same functions

almost certainly did/does" (Berliner and Friedman, 55). A second book by Randle and Schmitt, *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell*, published in 1994, displays some of the disagreements that Roswell-focused UFO researchers were beginning to have: for example, Randle and Schmitt discount the crash site identified in the stories of the deceased archaeologist, and supported by Friedman, in favor of the site identified by Frank Kaufmann.

"I just happened to be that one in 10 who grew up in Roswell with a desire to claim this heritage," says John Price, a Roswell native who became fascinated with UFOs as a young boy (Price, "Saucer," 15). In 1987, Price and his wife, Sherron, opened a video rental store called "Outa Limits." Because of his interest in UFOs, John Price adopted a flying saucer as a store logo and devoted a corner of the store to UFO displays – such as a copy of the "Majestic-12" document and framed newspaper clippings about the 1947 Roswell crash. He later added a float he had built for a 1991 State Fair parade – an eight-foot diameter flying saucer built from recycled satellite dishes, crewed by gray alien dolls sewn by his sister. Price said that "it came to the point around 1987 when I felt that locally somebody should do something to get people to look at the incident a little more seriously. We started in 1988 putting up a few displays in our local business. From there we evolved into a museum" (Holm and Follett, 93). The store was located near the former base, which, having been converted to an industrial park, made it convenient for local workers looking for a video to rent. But its location also placed it near the airport, and the Prices found that their flying saucer logo drew travelers "who came in out of

curiosity" (Price, *Roswell*, 44), seeking information about the Roswell incident. Price was among the first to see the commercial potential of Roswell's UFO connection, and produced a small line of souvenirs, such as t-shirts and hats, to sell in his store. But he also took UFO research seriously, asserting that "one thing I was very strict about was that no tabloid materials or *known* tabloid materials were to be displayed" (Price, *Roswell*, 94). By 1991 Outa Limits was equipped, unlike most video stores, with a table and chairs, allowing visitors to sit and talk (Price, *Roswell*, 55). "We helped many [researchers] by setting up interviews with witnesses, taking them to the debris field, or just providing a place to work out of," Price recalls (*ibid*, 66).

The store became a hot spot for UFO researchers and Roswell witnesses. Price's own interest deepened; and he researched the phenomenon further, adding new displays to the store. In 1990, UFO skeptic Phil Klass debated Clifford Stone, a local UFO researcher at the store. Store traffic was heavy that night and interfered with the videotaping of the debate. Later, when the problem repeated itself during an interview of Glenn Dennis, the mortician involved with the Roswell incident, Price decided to separate the UFO displays and video store. So, in April 1992, he officially opened the UFO Enigma Museum (McWilliams, 19).

The Prices relocated to a larger building, which allowed for expanded displays devoted to the 1947 incident, general UFO information, and a history of the Roswell AAF base. Local artist Kelly Pratt was hired to paint a mural as a backdrop for the fiberglass saucer, and a video room was equipped with plastic chairs, a TV, and a VCR for screening a considerable collection of UFO documentaries. UFO

tourists Matthew Holm and Jon Follett came to the conclusion that Price's "exhibits aren't exactly fit for the Smithsonian, but the information they contain is intriguing" (91). Price's beloved parade float, however, now installed as a diorama, they considered "campy, spaceman kitsch" (92).

Retired mortician Glenn Dennis and his brother, Robert, were frequent visitors to the Prices' video store, and had encouraged John Price's plans to expand his UFO display into a museum and souvenir shop. *"I had no idea that Glenn was working with Walter Haut – behind our backs"* (original emphasis), Price recalls, expressing his sense of betrayal upon discovering that Dennis and former base public relations officer Walter Haut were planning a museum of their own at the same time (Price, *Roswell*, 65). While Price had begun building his UFO displays in the face of perceived disapproval from the "Powers that Be," a shift in local politics, beginning around 1991, soon brought him competition in the form of the new museum, a private, nonprofit endeavor which received a fair amount of support and public endorsement from civic leaders. Tom Jennings, then a Roswell City Council member, said the Council wanted to support a museum "in town within walking distance of the other museums" (Price, *Roswell*, 94). Two of the most in-demand Roswell witnesses, Dennis and Haut, formed the board of the new museum, along with real estate developer Max Littell and *Roswell Daily Record* editor Jerry McCormick. "We knew these guys had a lot of clout," Price recalls, "Walter and Glenn were Roswell witnesses and very much in demand. Kevin Randle, Don Schmitt and Stanton Friedman needed these guys to promote their research...Max

Littell had been on the City Council, so we knew he had connections. Jerry McCormick was an editor for the local paper, so he could control the publicity” (*Roswell*, 79).

The International UFO Museum and Research Center (IUFORC) was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in September of 1991, with Walter Haut as president and Glenn Dennis as Vice President. An unused floor of a Sunwest Bank building was donated for office space and to store display material until a more permanent home could be found; to get the museum started, Haut and Dennis acquired some exhibitions from the Center for UFO Study in Chicago⁶ (Dill, "Eyewitness"). The *Roswell Daily Record* reported in July of 1992 that “Among the items that the museum hopes to offer are books, magazines and television and videocassette materials” (Hamilton, "Site Sought"); contributions for the reading room were donated “from its many visiting researchers and organizations such as the Fund for UFO Research and the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies” (N. Fleming, "UFO Museum").

To add visual appeal, the museum founders requested and were donated a prop alien from a film HBO was producing about the Roswell incident, as well as an alien sculpture by Oregon artist Steiner Karlsen (N. Fleming, "UFO Museum"). A downtown storefront across from the courthouse was rented from the city for the nominal amount of \$1 per year, and the museum opened in October of 1992. The

⁶ The Center for UFO Studies was founded in 1973 by Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the astronomer who served as a consultant on Air Force investigations into UFOs in the 1950s and 1960s, under the classified name Project Blue Book. When the Blue Book investigations were shut down in 1969, Hynek decided to pursue private research on the subject.

museum was considered a success by most standards, welcoming its 10,000th visitor a little less than eight months after opening (ibid.), while some areas, such as a video room for screening documentaries, were still under construction. Meanwhile, by November of 1992, John Price's museum "had a very noticeable decrease in visitors" (Price, *Roswell*, 152).

I asked a half a dozen people to call the Chamber of Commerce and say that they were from out of town and wanted to see the UFO stuff, so where do I go. The Chamber directed all these people to 400 North Main every time and mentioned us only once. They made it clear that we were a video store with a few UFO displays. This was a total lie, as we had the only full-sized crash scene, a complete UFO history, and the museum alone was 2,200 square feet. This was compared to [the IUFORC's] maybe 1,800 square feet at North Main. I was furious but not surprised at their one-sided politics (ibid).

As a nonprofit, the IUFORC did benefit from special considerations from the city, such as the nominal rent, as well as support from such groups as the Southeastern New Mexico Historical Museum Foundation, "because they felt the Roswell UFO crash was of historic significance to the area" (John Miller, "Panel"). Holm and Follett consider the IUFOMRC "more slickly produced than Enigma. The exterior signs, the brochures, and even the crash-landed UFO embedded above the doorway have a professional sheen" (94). Inside, "the mood is much more serious. Free-standing displays and well-crafted exhibits fill the main room, a far-cry from Enigma's haphazard construction" (94). While they appreciated "several pieces of

interesting alien art" (94), again, they were put off by a diorama they deemed kitsch: "an 'alien autopsy' display from the movie *Roswell* in which a pinkish extraterrestrial lies on a gurney with a curiously attired surgeon waiting nearby" (94). A *National Review* article from 1995 notes that the "museum lies behind an unassuming storefront, unremarkable but for the small extraterrestrial figure waving through the window. Inside, the atmosphere is more *Our Town* than *Alien*. There is no hint of New Age. It is, well, 'scientific.' Visitors seem slightly subdued as they wandered through the exhibit with a mixture of enthusiasm, curiosity, and embarrassment" (Stuttaford, 28).

As always when UFOs are involved, credibility is a very visible issue in the IUFOMRC's self-presentation; in the case of the museum, credibility also becomes conflated with the "authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see" (MacCannell, 1999: 14). Interviewed in an Associated Press item from July 6, 1992 ("UFO Incident Alive After 45 Years"), Walter Haut used a number of techniques to establish credibility. He sought to distance the museum's founders from stereotypical "crackpots," telling the press, "We're not a bunch of weird Harolds with Frisbees and such." He also placed the incident in a historical context, saying, "It's part of New Mexico's history...The UFO crash is of significant historical value." He further sought to establish the museum's "objectivity:" "Haut said the museum will avoid taking a stand on whether the crash involved a balloon or a flying saucer." Finally, Haut established his personal credibility by relating his own skepticism and lack of desire to be at the center of a "flying saucer flap": "At the

time, when I put out the news release, my own feeling was ‘My God, why are we getting involved in this stupid thing? . . . And when they said it was only a weather balloon, I kind of wiped the sweat from my brow and thought, ‘I’m glad . . .’” The *Roswell Daily Record* actively participated in building the credibility of the museum’s founders, noting on one occasion, “Haut, who isn’t selling anything and does not gain financially from the interviews he gives, is more interested in the truth” (Dill, "Eyewitness").



Fig. 14: International UFO Museum and Research Center, Roswell, New Mexico (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

Glenn Dennis has used similar tactics on other occasions. In a brief self-published account of his involvement with the incident, he claims, “If I had realized

what would happen, and how many people would want to interview me, I would have never said a word" (7). An item in the *Daily Record* in 1997 says that with "the current worldwide interest in the Roswell case showing no signs of abating, Dennis finds the high profile publicity and demands for appearances on national television contrary to his lifestyle" (Francis, "Eyewitness").

A letter to the editor of the *Roswell Daily Record*, printed July 1, 1997, reads:

I have known Glenn Dennis almost 60 years. Walter Haut, Frank Kaufmann and Bob Shirkey, I have known each of them about 50 years...Glenn Dennis, Walt Haut, Frank Kaufmann and Bob Shirkey are all good men. They are also reputable men and truthful men. They are not going to fib about anything or prevaricate or distort the truth. I believe every word they say about the 1947 Roswell Incident.

Richard G. Bean

As implied in this letter, personal relationships add another dimension when credibility is at issue, and in the case of Roswell, the communities of town and military base represent a web of personal relationships, some of very long standing, that even an outsider can find compelling. Walter Haut, for example, regularly expressed to museum visitors his conviction that his superior officer, Col. Blanchard, was not the sort to hastily or carelessly order a sensational press release; while Jesse Marcel he recalled as "a very stable type of individual who is not prone to going off on tangents...He handled the material, and is one of two people I know who

handled the material and are willing to talk about it. They are two fine witnesses.

You can't discredit them. They are good people" (Dill, "Eyewitness").

The concept of credibility is also expressed through a rigorous approach to the subject matter. As Jodi Dean notes, "ufological discourse upholds the very criteria for scientific rationality that mainstream science uses to dismiss it" (1998: 9). A letter to the *Roswell Daily Record* from "Patricia A Davey, Roswell" complains:

I had walked more than 20 blocks in the searing sun in order to place my friend, Diane Tessman's, internationally best selling book, 'Earth Changes Bible,' published by Inner Light. My reception was anything but flattering.

I had thought the International UFO Museum was open to any and all opinions regarding UFOs. From the attitude shown toward myself, however, I guess that is not true. One has to be a skeptic or abducted by grays. One must never have been contacted/interacted with international beings!

Gee, what a shame. Since the UFO mystery is still largely unsolved, shouldn't the mind be open to any and all options equally?"

The answer to this rhetorical question, as far as the dominant voices in ufology are concerned, is "no," and that attitude is reflected by the displays in the museum. Andrew Stuttaford observed in *National Review* that the "Roswell museums tend to ignore ufology's mystics, instead catering to the more scientifically inclined. Theirs is a world of grainy photographs and a frantic search for the one unchallengeable piece of hard evidence" (28). In 1996, a small piece of metal

reportedly found near the crash site was brought to the museum with the suggestion that it might be a long-lost fragment from the UFO. After analysis, the museum announced that the fragment was a bit of jewelry crafted in Utah. As of 2004, the museum still had an exhibit devoted to the fragment – not displaying it as a piece of a UFO, but describing the processes used to identify the sample, as an example of the rigorous approach to evidence that sound ufology requires. Yet the material on exhibit does diverge from the strictly scientific – though not into the realm of the “mystic.” Movie posters from “Star Trek” and “Independence Day” connect the concerns of “serious” ufologists to those of fans of science fiction and popular culture.

In 1998, Jodi Dean could convincingly argue that America had entered “an age of aliens, an alien age when alien images and alien copies and copies of aliens appear unpredictably and unannounced in places they shouldn’t, in places we can’t understand, in multiple, contradictory, alien places” (5). In 1995, a British pop star, Reg Presley, announced on a BBC program the existence of footage of an autopsy of an alien body, supposedly recovered at Roswell. Music promoter and producer Ray Santilli claimed to have acquired the film from a retired army cameraman (Pflock, 201). The film was exhibited privately to ufologists and journalists, creating a buzz of publicity; broadcast rights were bought by Robert Kivat for \$125,000, who produced a one-hour special for the FOX network around the footage, “Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?” which aired for the first time on August 28, 1995 and was rebroadcast several times.

American culture's "alien boom" of the 1990s is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenal success of the alien-themed television series *The X-Files*, which first aired on the FOX network in September of 1993 and saw a steady increase in ratings over the next few years, peaking in 1997. The show's catchphrase, "The truth is out there," became a pop culture reference of far-reaching viral popularity, and its running narrative, concerning two FBI agents' attempts to uncover an international conspiracy involving top-secret experiments with alien biology and technology, became highly inter-referential with mainstream discussions of all manner of conspiracy theories. Dean notes that *The X-Files*'s "insight into the themes and anxieties just below the surface of American society in fact presupposes a general cultural awareness of this discourse. 'Getting it' requires prior knowledge of UFOs and alien abduction" (1998: 29). The same elliptical strategy is visible in the hit 1997 film *Independence Day*. The resolution of the narrative's Man vs. Alien conflict depends upon a saucer recovered from the Roswell crash, yet this crucial plot point is introduced in a minimal, ironic manner, as an eccentric senior citizen (Judd Hirsch) exclaims:

In the 1950s, whatever, you had that spaceship – yeah, that thing you found! – what was that, Roswell, New Mexico! No, you had that spaceship and you had the bodies all locked up in a bunker...

The president of the United States (Bill Pullman) begins to dismiss this outburst, saying, "Regardless of what you may have read in the tabloids..." only to be

interrupted by his secretary of defense, who sheepishly admits that the Roswell story is true. No further explanation of the government's possession of a saucer is given, nor, the film seems to assume, is needed. And indeed that same year a "Time/CNN poll says 80 percent of its respondents believe the U.S. government is covering up its knowledge of the existence of aliens. Sixty-five percent believe a UFO crashed in Roswell in 1974" (Dean, 1998: 3-4).

In 1997, the IUFOMRC moved into a larger location, a former movie theater on Main Street, in the heart of Roswell's old downtown. Downtown Roswell, like the downtowns of many small to mid-sized cities, suffered an economic hemorrhage in the 1980s after the construction of a new shopping mall on the highway (E. Fleming, 12). Walking down Main Street today, one can see remnants of that depressed time in the form of a few pawn shops and gun shops with barred windows. Evidence of more recent gentrification is also present – the craft stores, art galleries, antique malls and boutiques that characterize attempts to reinvigorate "historic" downtowns throughout the United States, though not many towns have ever had a gallery such as Star Child, which in 1997 offered Roswell's visitors "handcrafted pottery and jewelry, featuring local UFO artists" (advertisement, *Gateway* 2:1, 24).

In 2000, the Alien Resistance Headquarters opened at Second and Main, a block away from the IUFOMRC. Guy Malone, identified as a "counter-cult researcher and author," told the *Daily Record* that "his goals in opening the ARHQ are to present a biblical perspective on the UFO phenomenon," because he finds "the

cult-like following aliens have received” to be “very unsettling.” Malone and his Florida-based backers believe that the “phenomena is real,” but wish to caution “Christians to be wary of these creatures and of the influence they exert on their lives” (Laughead, "Alien Resistance"). In 2004, Beau Baumann, whose company Elm Street Entertainment builds the haunted-house type of concession that the carnival industry calls “dark attractions,” came to Roswell to build Alien Encounter a couple of blocks north of the IUFOMRC. A windowless black-lit building featuring sets that represent common nightmare scenarios, Alien Encounter is a dark attraction in which, for \$8, visitors undergo a “Fear Test” at the behest of aliens experimenting with human psychology. “We believe in bringing the family together again,” Bauman told local journalist Gailanne Dill. “A family might walk in and they are five individuals, maybe with brother and sister fighting. When they come out, however, they are holding onto each other. They walk out as one unit, as one set of legs with the father sort of carrying them all” ("Alien Encounter").

In 2000, the IUFOMRC considered moving to a new location ten miles west of downtown, citing the need for growth. Barbara Hedricks, manager of a western boot store, told the *Daily Record*, “I think it’s going to be devastating...I think it’s really going to wipe out downtown Roswell.” Hedricks and Connie Amador, the owner of a downtown gallery, said that the majority of their customers were out-of-town visitors who came to see the museum. “We hardly get any town people – unless they have visitors with them,” Amador said. (Laughead, "Merchants"). A letter to the editor printed on July 16, 2000, from Roberta Ahlness, president of the

MainStreet Roswell Board, agreed: “The UFO museum has been responsible for the growing health of downtown Roswell . . . We hope all Roswell residents appreciate this asset.”



Fig. 15: Downtown Roswell: Boutique Kitchen Gourmet and Alien Resistance HQ (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

Downtown merchants weren't the only ones who saw the museum, and the city's UFO connection, as assets to be capitalized on, though not all of Roswell's residents were eager to embrace the identity of "UFO Capital of the United States." When John Price began displaying UFO material in his video store in the late 1980s, "the whole UFO field was a stigma and the powers that be didn't appreciate Roswell being at the forefront of it," he recalled (Price, "Saucer," 16). Michael Fisher, news

director for local station KSFY, felt that “It’s almost like people are embarrassed about the incident – that we are just kooks that believe in UFOs...Why not capitalize on it?” (Dudding, "Researcher's Book").

The first steps were tentative. In 1991, Mayor William F. Brainerd declared the Wednesday after July 9 to be “UFO Day.” Ufologists Kevin Randle and Don Schmitt conducted a local seminar, attended by about 500 residents, in conjunction with the release of their new book, *UFO Crash at Roswell*. While Randle and Schmitt saw the program as an opportunity to encourage more residents to come forward with their stories, J.J. Johnson, the executive director of the chamber of commerce, said it “was to spark local interest in a nationally publicized book” that he hoped would “generate interest and proceeds into starting a project that would capture the entire world’s attention” (Goodnight). He pointedly added that “the authors are being featured on nationally televised programs, from CNN’s ‘Larry King Live’ to NBC’s ‘Today Show.’”

As early as 1991, businessman Stan Crosby had ideas about “economic development concerning Roswell’s UFO culture,” but did not find a kindred soul until the 1994 election of Tom Jennings to the office of Mayor (Gross, "Have UFOs"). An anonymous item picked up from the Albuquerque paper on July 03, 1984, noted that New Mexico’s economy had enjoyed its “best performance since 1979,” due to growth in the “trade and services sector...benefitting from a growth in tourism” (9), and Roswell’s civic leaders and residents were certainly interested in the idea of

some sort of summer festival or event to attract a share of tourists to Roswell. A letter to the editor published July 8, 1986, reads:

Isn't it a shame that Roswell, the "All American City," let Liberty Weekend slip by without a city celebration. If this is an indication of the leadership we can expect from our Chamber of Commerce, City Manager's office, and Mayor's office, I wonder how we're going to get out of our economic doldrums.

In 1987, the Roswell Parks and Recreation Department began holding a "Festival in the Park," a fair with arts and crafts, food booths, local music and entertainment ("Festival," 10). In 1992, about 4,500 people from the surrounding area attended (Jay Miller, "Showers"). But some local boosters envisioned something more original, more site-specific, that would bring visitors from further away. In 1994, local television news director Michael Fisher told the *Daily Record* that "All over New Mexico, cities have celebrations that put them on the map...Deming has the Duck Races, Las Cruces has the Whole Enchilada Fiesta and Albuquerque has the Balloon Fiesta" (Dudding, "Researcher's Book"). MainStreet Roswell, an "organization dedicated to the vitality of the downtown," tried a Chile Cheese Festival, "to draw attention to the community's vast agricultural resources" (DaHarb), which was a mild success. That same year, recently elected Mayor Tom Jennings declared July 1994 to be "UFO Awareness Month," and Stan Crosby, vice president of MainStreet Roswell's board of directors, announced plans for a UFO celebration in July of 1995. "Stan Crosby and I grew up together," Jennings told the *Daily Record*. "We talked

about it and made a conscious decision that this was a great opportunity, and it was tied in with what we wanted to promote – tourism and economic development” (Featsent). Crosby said, “I do want folks to know that we’re very aware of the sensitivity of such an event...Not everyone believes in UFOs and not everyone thinks Roswell should be known for UFOs, especially when Roswell has so many other things going for it. I’d like to assure those people that whatever we plan will be done in good taste” (DaHarb).

Max Littel and Walter Haut of the UFO Museum were included in the very early planning stages of “UFO Encounter ‘95,” to scout for guest speakers and help plan a conference that would attract those seriously interested in the subject matter (DaHarb); Crosby hoped to “make Roswell a destination city” for organized trips by UFO groups (Schneidmiller, “UFO Encounter”). But this was only one aspect of the event, which also incorporated and enlarged upon the local town-fair functions of “Festival in the Park,” organized and branded under a UFO theme. Many of the arts and crafts vendors, for example, produced wares that featured aliens or flying saucers. Contests for homemade alien costumes and UFO parade floats were also included to get local residents involved.

These efforts met with moderate, but not spectacular, success. Ufologists Kevin Randle, Donald Schmitt and Stanton Friedman all spoke to an audience of about 200 people on July 3. The atmosphere was serious but collegial; Randle argued for the “need to work together, admit past mistakes and the possibility of future ones and refrain from personal attacks on one another” (Schneidmiller, “UFO

Encounter"). A visitor from Houston who had had UFO experiences told the *Daily Record* that he was glad for "a chance for believers to discuss UFOs without being ridiculed" (ibid). A number of locals proved willing to play along; the costume contest had some fifty entrants, the float parade a half-dozen. Both received much friendly coverage in the *Daily Record*, which treated residents to photos of local children in costumes and an amusing account of the parade:

Most floats managed the block fairly well, but the cone saucer – which one spectator called the 'death machine' – had a life of its own, veering from side to side and several times nearly hitting the sidewalk. "We had a good time," said Dusty Huckabee, one of the cone-saucer's pilots. "The one that came here [in 1947] was out of control" too, he added (Schneidmiller, "UFO Encounter").

The turnout to all of the events, about 9,000 people in total, was less than half of what organizers had hoped for, however, and was only slightly higher for UFO Encounter '96 the next year. Columnist Jay Miller suggested that "Roswellites seem a little embarrassed, or maybe even turned off, at all the attention they receive for something that seems a little weird" ("UFO Encounter"). Stan Crosby was not discouraged; his interest lay not just in the "immediate economic impact," but in the "long-term dividends and increased tourism and business for Roswell" (Gross, "Crosbys"). The first festival was "a warm-up" for the 50th anniversary of the crash in 1997, he told the *Daily Record*; "I think this year we paid the bills, broken even and had a learning experience. Next year we'll do a little better and for the 50th we'll

knock your socks off" (Schneidmiller, "UFO Encounter"). The vendors who had worked with the theme, "selling items like alien-head whistles or UFO videotapes," had done the best business, he pointed out, arguing that tourists "wanted something unique to Roswell" (ibid). Mike Francis continued to support the festival as well, arguing that:

How we got to be world famous is not as important as what we do with this great opportunity. Whether or not, if given the chance, some of us would have chosen our "flying saucer identity," really doesn't matter. The positive result is that we *have an identity*. Some *never* find one. We should enjoy it, have fun with it and entertain our children with it ("Incidentally").

A remarkable amount of community involvement went into organizing the 1997 festival, which John Garcia of the New Mexico Department of Tourism called "Woodstock, alien-style" and journalist Ann Featsent deemed "a veritable love-in for abductees, conspiracy theorists, science fiction addicts and *X-Files* fans" (28). At the center of the hoopla, however, the UFO conference remained a serious and critical affair. Whitley Strieber, author of the 1987 best-selling alien-abduction memoir *Communion*, gave an address that critiqued the "history that continues to elude narrative, a history of black budgets, experiments on civilian populations, and a community of secrets that during the Cold War came to stand in for the U.S. government," arguing that "Where secrets start, the Republic stops" (Dean, 1998: 188).

National interest in the Roswell Incident reached a peak that year. Mayor Tom Jennings said that “we couldn’t buy the coverage we received from the media. We hit the jackpot” (Featsent, 29). Corporate sponsors got involved with local activities; Seagram’s Absolut Vodka unveiled a Roswell UFO-themed advertisement at Mayor Jennings’s reception on July 3, while the Coca-Cola Company, which was promoting “a series of glass bottles imprinted with the names of cities of historic interest,” sponsored a local theatre production of “Roswell: The Musical,” a dramatization of the crash-and-recovery story. At the premiere, patrons drank from special “Roswell” Coke bottles while watching “Jesse Marcel” sing “Who Can I Turn To?” (“Coca-Cola,” 9). The Sci-Fi Channel scheduled five days of special programming, including Roswell-themed episodes of regular series such as *Sightings* and *Sci-Fi Buzz* (Villone, 12). In all, over a thousand press representatives were in town that weekend (Featsent, 29).

A great deal of preparation was involved in readying the community to receive a large influx of visitors. The local police and hospital arranged to have additional people on duty, while the New Mexico National Guard helped them rehearse emergency responses (Jay Miller, “More Than UFO City”). Several “hospitality training workshops” for hotel and restaurant workers were organized (ibid); Mario Reid, the owner of a local restaurant, “had a general staff meeting and gave the staff maps and schedules of events. We talked about how to try and handle the tourists, as well as keep our regulars satisfied” (Featsent, 29). The Roswell Parks and Recreation Department obtained the use of a school stadium to host “youth and

family activities,” such as a “virtual-reality tent, laser tag, flight simulators, jolly jumps and a reenactment of a UFO military compound hangar” (Lenniger).

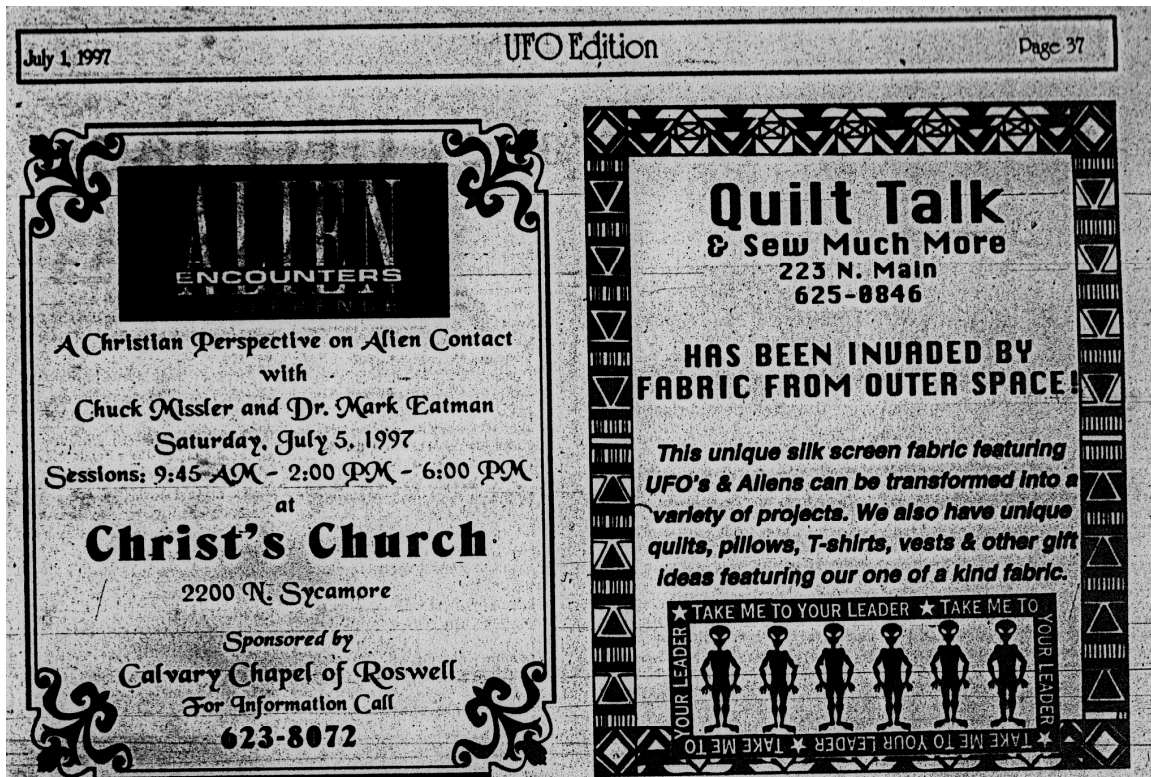


Fig. 16: UFO Encounter '97: wide involvement from the community (ads from the Roswell Daily Record)

Ann Featsent's account of the Encounter '97 Banquet for *Restaurants USA* magazine illustrates the level of cooperation that went into orchestrating a single event.

Sponsored by the *Roswell Daily Record* and catered by Mario Reid of Mario's Restaurant and Lounge, the banquet was held in a vintage 20,000 square-foot hangar on the former base, intended to evoke “the famous – though long since demolished – Hangar 84, where the original debris and alien bodies were believed to be temporarily stored after the crash” (30). The hangar, normally used to store airport rental cars, was emptied and hosed out by the local volunteer fire department. As it

lacked any kitchen facilities, Reid was allowed to use the nearby Roswell Job Corps Culinary School, while some of the culinary students augmented his staff (29). Drawing about 40,000 people (“Turning Point”), a considerable influx to a town of 45,000, the 1997 UFO festival represented a peak in attendance. But Roswell has continued to hold a UFO festival every year since.



Fig. 17: UFO festival as town fair: pony rides and crafts vendors (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

Not all residents are enthusiastic about hosting “Woodstock, alien-style;” a July 12, 2000 letter to the editor of the *Daily Record* from “Spunky Baldock, Roswell” complained:

It seems that our UFO festival is no longer just a gargantuan freak show, but is now the venue for New

Age Enlightenment. We learn that our historic biblical roots have been a lie all along. Therefore, we need not bend our knee to an Eternal, All-Wise, Just, Holy and Loving Creator. Somewhere “out there” in the vast reaches of the universe, we will one day reconnect with our real progenitors. The deception, “ye shall be as gods” tempted and captivated our first parents and sadly, continues to deceive Adam’s race to this day.

But that same week, an anonymous editorial repeated the call to UFO boosterism, in a highly ambivalent, but almost grimly determined tone:

Now there are as many opinions on the UFO ‘tradition’ as there are people in Roswell. A lot of folks, for various reasons, would just as soon see the whole thing just disappear. Thanks to all the publicity surrounding the alleged “Roswell incident,” people tend to identify Roswell and its residents as somehow intimately connected with UFOs, aliens and other weirdness, when in fact most of us are just regular folks with no special interest in any of that. Even relative newcomers can’t help wincing a bit when a stranger finds out they’re from Roswell, and immediately asks if they’ve seen an alien or a spaceship lately. Polite responses can sometimes be difficult to summon up, even for the most patient Roswellite.

On the other hand, maybe we need to stop taking ourselves so seriously, at least part of the time. Whether we like it or not, the image of Roswell as “alien city” is pretty well fixed in most outsiders' minds. And rather than try to fight the obvious, we could try to use it to our advantage instead. Making the effort to put on a good party every year can bring some big rewards to our community. After all, there is a huge, ready-made audience for it. Does it really matter all that much that we call it a UFO festival? If taken with a grain of salt, even the most hardened sourpuss could find something fun to do at a well-planned, well-executed festival – UFO oriented or not (“Turning Point”).

And indeed, the festivals typically feature a number of recreational activities loosely-related or unrelated to UFOs. The Roswell UFO Festival 2003 had not only the usual lecture series and contests, but such activities as “UFO Rock-N-Bowl Bowling,” “UFO Independent Music Festival,” and “Classic Sci-Fi Film Festival.”

By the time Holm and Follett visited in 1996, they could state positively that “the UFO crash – real or imagined – has provided Roswell with a tangible national identity, defining it in a way that sports, music, or industry defines other cities” (9; and in 1997, New Mexico syndicated columnist Jay Miller agreed: “Roswell is now on the world’s maps...the oil and agricultural center of 48,000 in southeastern New Mexico will be forever associated with UFOs and space aliens. Such notoriety may not be what a city would choose as its claim to fame, but often fate does the choosing for us” (“Makes the Big Time”). What Miller attributes to “fate” might be better understood as an example of a particular set of people – in this case, residents of a particular city – finding themselves “in a situation where the mechanisms of media production are concentrated,” where “they may witness the spatiality of the media frame in a way that is not ritually effective but shocking: for example, when people who want to be represented realise it is not they, but only ‘media people,’ who control where the camera goes” (Couldry, 2001: 55). Different people will respond differently to this discovery; but Roswell’s civic life, since 1994, has been dominated by the response that Stan Crosby, the driving force behind the UFO Encounters, compares to “making lemonade out of lemons” (Gross, “Have UFOs”).

Since 1995, the glossy publications put out by the Roswell Chamber of Commerce have been adorned with images of big-eyed gray aliens and UFOs. The cover of *Roswell* 79 (2001) features a large illustration of three friendly-looking grays hovering over smaller inset photos of the courthouse, the New Mexico Military Institute, and a desert sunset. The caption reads "Down to earth place to visit . . . out of this world place to experience." An ad for the city inside features scenes of local natural beauty, promising "a close encounter of the natural kind," while a cartoon nuclear family of gray aliens smiles and waves from the lower left corner.

Roswell Volume 82's (2004) cover shows the county administration building with yellow-ribbon-bedecked trees in front. A small cartoon green alien hovers in the lower right corner, seemingly turning the page to open the brochure for the reader. Of course, the IUFOMRC is described in the brochure's list of the city's attractions:

They are only to (sic) happy to answer questions, with great enthusiasm and color, show you around a bit, take pictures with you, and sign your brochure. They are a wealth of knowledge on the subject because they witnessed that fateful time in 1947 most of us can only read about.

Besides the actual live witnesses, the museum houses many other fascinating articles . . . It is a place enjoyed by young or old, supporter or critic . . . No matter what, the truth is out there . . . (35).

The state of New Mexico has also found ways to use Roswell's alien associations as a lure. As of 2001, tourism was the second largest private sector

industry in New Mexico, bringing in \$3.6 billion in travel expenditures alone; yet the New Mexico Department of Tourism had a budget of only \$13 million – for comparative purposes, about a fourth of the amount spent by Florida (Cochnar, 13). This limited amount of advertising resources tends to result in campaigns that rely heavily on synergy, linking one attraction to another to increase the drawing power of both. In 1998, Jay Miller commented that “It appears UFOs are about to pass adobes as New Mexico’s top tourist attraction” (“Billboards”), and beginning around 1997, the state started incorporating “otherworldly” references and associations into its marketing, investing other New Mexico attractions with a sense of the uncanny. For example, in 1997 the New Mexico Department of Tourism produced a series of advertising postcards featuring pictures of such standard attractions as Carlsbad Caverns, bearing the slogan “It’s In Our State But It’s Out of This World.” A print ad from the same year claims, “Whether you’re from Saturn or driving one, you’ll find yourself enchanted by New Mexico. In a few hours you can find deserts that look like moonscapes, dwellings of long-vanished peoples, and histories carved in stone” (Watson, 12).

The Center for Hospitality and Tourism Studies at New Mexico State University hosts a project called Rural Economic Development Through Tourism, with a newsletter titled “Newline – New Mexico Tourism.” The Summer 1997 issue was subtitled “New Mexico Tourism is OUT OF THIS WORLD,” and featured an article by Karen Watson, REDTT project director, headlined “New Mexico Tourism: Phenomenal.” Commenting on the success of the Roswell UFO Encounter ‘97, she

writes, "While tourism circles have been talking about cultural tourism, historical tourism, and nature tourism, New Mexico has been leading the way with a new trend: phenomenal tourism." She cites a dictionary definition of phenomenon as something "extraordinary," then links the extraordinary nature of UFOs to attractions such as Carlsbad Caverns and the White Sands National Monument.

Both the state of New Mexico and the town of Roswell clearly recognize the economic value of the Roswell incident, and as I have detailed in this chapter, many civic leaders in Roswell, such as Tom Jennings and Stan Crosby, openly acknowledge this as a motivation for their promotion of UFO tourism. This might make it tempting to dismiss Roswell's UFO tourism industry as cynical and mercenary. But while tourism promotion materials tend to downplay serious UFO belief, or avoid explicitly marketing UFO research as an attraction, favoring a playful, noncommittal approach built around punny slogans and cartoon aliens, civic leaders in Roswell do show a sense of obligation to treat UFO believers with respect. The *Roswell Daily Record* consistently reports on the lectures and book signings of ufologists in a neutral, informative manner, a marked contrast to the arch, superior tone often displayed by *Dallas Morning News* columnists towards that city's conspiracy tourists (c.f. Larry Powell's reference to "JFK loons," p. 61). The staff at the IUFOMRC demonstrated an unusual willingness to assist me in my research, and indeed this was true of nearly everyone I dealt with in Roswell, from the Historical Society to the Chamber of Commerce. I learned from talking to ufologists at the 2004 festival that their experiences have been similar. In 1997,

Mayor Tom Jennings told the *Roswell Daily Record* that the “one universal question he’s asked is whether he believes in the purported 1947 UFO crash. ‘I always tell them, “I wish I knew,” ‘he says, ‘and then I ask them if they believe’” (Byers). Perhaps he sensed the potential inadequacy of this cagey non-answer even as he gave it, however, for in the same interview, asked what message he would like to convey to those coming to town for the UFO festival, he said, “Have fun and hopefully we can assist you in your inquiries about the Roswell Incident and extraterrestrial life . . . We all want to know and we share in your quest” (ibid).

In fact, I think what emerges most strikingly from this study of UFO tourism in Roswell is the way in which these tensions are neither resolved nor avoided, but rather incorporated into the experience. Fainstein and Judd argue that “the tourism industry is preoccupied with shaping and responding to the desire for carnival-like diversion, on the one hand, and a yearning for extraordinary, but ‘real,’ experience on the other” (7), and indeed the dual elements of “fun” and “quest” invoked by Mayor Jennings are interwoven throughout the Roswell UFO festival, a duality that perhaps gives the experience a peculiarly memorable character. In describing the concept of the “tourist enclave,” Dennis Judd (1999) notes that many cities separate tourist space from the space where residents live (36), sometimes with “no reference to the surrounding context at all” (52). Over the past fifteen years, at least two would-be entrepreneurs have floated the idea of building a UFO theme park near Roswell (Nelson, “Escamilla;” Zucco), while more recently plans have been drawn and backing solicited for “Earth Station Roswell,” a proposed “\$45 million resort

complex featuring a spaceship-shaped hotel, spa, restaurants, shops, sci-fi theatre, concert arena, exhibits, light shows and tropical garden” (Hanes). But, as we have seen, so far Roswell has had its greatest success by bringing tourists and residents together in the center of the town proper, in what city planner Zach Montgomery calls “a street festival type of environment” (Ridgely), which Houston tourist and UFO witness Clayton Lee deemed “a great thing for the UFOs and the community”(Schneidmiller, "Aliens").



Fig. 18: Inside the IUFOMRC, visitors await an appearance by ufologist Don Schmitt (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

The Roswell UFO festival continues to be a gathering point for those with a serious interest in UFOs, from a wide variety of perspectives. In 2004, the IUFOMRC held workshops such as, for example, “The Profile of an Abductee,” hosted by Derrel Sims, “CM.Ht, R.H.A. Investigator and Researcher of

Human/Alien Contact"; for \$10, attendees could learn about "Statistics and Formulations on Contactees/Abductees" and "An Overview of Tools We Use to Collect Information." Guy Malone of Alien Resistance HQ held "The Ancient of Days UFO and Abduction Conference" the same weekend, "to bring together a wide variety of beliefs, backgrounds and areas of specialty in UFOs" with an "emphasis on theology" (Duncan). With eighty pre-registered attendees, Malone told the *Daily Record* that "he expects registration money, walk-in fees and video and DVD sales to cover the \$12,000 in expenses for putting on the conference. Any extra money will go toward the Alien Resistance Headquarters's work" (ibid). The schedule of events also included showings of the television series "The Invaders," a meet and greet with "The Duras Sisters from Star Trek" [actresses Gwynyth Walsh and Barbara Scarfe], a planetarium show on "Stonehenge, UFOs and Beyond," a concert by the Drifters, Temptations, and Platters, and, of course, the annual costume contest, emceed by ufologist Donald Schmitt.



Fig. 19: Donald Schmitt (center) talks with families of young costumers onstage at the IUFOMRC (photo 2004 by Shelley McGinnis)

The Roswell UFO festival has proven a successful and enduring event because it does provide valued experiences for both those who believe and those who are willing to play along – or keep quiet. Karl Pflock – a ufologist who researched the Roswell incident in depth, only to come to the conclusion that the object that left debris scattered across Mack Brazel’s ranch was an experimental apparatus of earthly origin – in 1991 first interviewed Walter Whitmore Jr., the son of the man who had owned Roswell radio station KGFL in 1947 and helped to break the original story. Whitmore –who died in 1995 – claimed not only to have seen and handled the debris, but to have kept a small piece of it. Despite repeated urgings, Whitmore proved immovably reluctant to produce this long-sought piece of hard evidence – and not, Pflock suggests, because he was nervous about possessing the

only known piece of an extraterrestrial spacecraft. "Whitmore definitely did not relish the idea of being the guy who rained on the city's UFO-dollars parade," Pflock says. "Small town life can be rough" (153).

Chapter 4: "Spying for the American People:" Area 51 Tourism in Nevada

On October 16, 1993, several dozen protesters gathered near the foothills of White Sides Mountain in the Nevada desert and made the two-mile hike up to a spot nicknamed "Freedom Ridge." While such an isolated spot might not seem an ideal place to stage a demonstration, in this case, the location was both at the center of the protest and the hook that attracted media attention to it. At issue was the Air Force's petition to withdraw from public access nearly four thousand acres of publicly-owned land – including Freedom Ridge and White Sides Mountain, from whose slopes anyone willing to make the hike could glimpse the runways, hangars, and radar dishes of an air base hidden amongst the mountains at the side of the Groom Lake salt flat. As researcher Glenn Campbell – who had discovered the Freedom Ridge vantage point several months earlier and organized the protest – says, there "is nothing apparently unworldly about this base; it looks at first glance like many other Air Force installations, although the airstrip, hangars and radar facilities are unusually large" (*Guide*, 11). What makes this base unusual is the fact that, officially, it does not exist: it appears nowhere on any government map, or in any military budget. When asked about the protest, a Pentagon public relations officer said only that the Restricted Zone around Groom Lake is "probably a secret

test facility and I don't have a need to know that, so I don't know about that" (Good).

The protesters fell into one or more of several categories: aviation buffs, UFO researchers, government watchdogs, environmentalists, and people who wanted to "see something strange – not UFOs themselves, but weird UFO types" (Patton, 13). Among them was author and journalist Phil Patton, who admits a fascination with the Groom Lake base as a surviving figment of Cold War fantasy, where "smart scientists saved the world, as in a science fiction film, the Manhattan Project made permanent" (11). He describes his first glimpse of the Nevada base in almost dreamlike terms:

Hiking up to Freedom Ridge, dodging the brambly and fragrant sage and the fuzzy, Muppet-like Joshua trees, we crossed rocks that seem inscribed with some alien cuneiform. We walked a few feet from the perimeter of the base, marked by orange signposts running across the high desert: 'Use of deadly force authorized.' On the other side of this barrier were strange-looking silver balls the size of basketballs on poles. The lore held that they were motion detectors or other sensors...

It was all in sharper detail than I had anticipated. We saw a Jeep come up a road far in the distance. A bus glittered. The base unfolded beneath as we reached the crest – the long dry white lake, a line of buildings, fuel tanks, an old bus, the big radar dish, a seven-mile runway – and the white horizontal of the dry lake itself. The vehicle turned around after a while and left (7).

Due to its official nonexistence, the base has no acknowledged name, but it has been called a variety of things over the years. Watertown was the code name

used by the CIA, which oversaw the base's construction in the 1950s. Ben Rich – former head of the Lockheed Skunk Works, whose U2 spy plane was the first top-secret project tested at the base – recalled that to “those in the know it was simply the ‘Ranch’ or ‘the remote location’” (Patton, 3). It has been referred to as Dreamland or The Box by the air traffic controllers at the adjacent Nellis Air Force base, whose pilots are forbidden to fly above it. But it has entered popular culture, by way of ufology, under a fairly innocuous name derived from its location on a numbered Atomic Energy Commission map: Area 51. In fact, the term “Area 51” has to some extent transcended referring to a specific location. As Glenn Campbell says, “used in the vernacular by UFO buffs, it refers both to the entire military Restricted Zone and to the alleged government cover-up of alien craft hidden anywhere in Nevada” (*Guide*, 11); to the more general public, its meaning is even more free-floating, often becoming blurred or conflated with other narratives concerning aliens and government cover-ups, including, frequently, the Roswell UFO crash.

In this chapter, I turn to what is perhaps the most unusual, and yet one of the most revealing, case studies of conspiracy-themed tourism. As I noted in the introduction, “Area 51” is in many ways a highly atypical tourist destination. Both Dallas and Roswell have established hospitality industries to accommodate tourists, as well as a variety of attractions (such as historical sites, museums, and shopping) to entertain them. The area surrounding “Area 51,” on the other hand, has very little to offer in the way of accommodation, and the main attraction is a site that

cannot actually be visited. And yet, as I shall elaborate, this very inaccessibility is key to the drawing power of “Area 51:” there really are government secrets being kept there. While the existence of the classified air base has been known for some time to aviation buffs – who frequently prowl the surrounding area hoping for a glimpse of experimental aircraft technology – its status as a marketable tourist attraction originated in the sensational claims of one man, Bob Lazar, who in 1989 began turning up on local Las Vegas radio and television programs asserting that, ten months earlier, he had been employed at the facility (or more accurately, in a secret, concealed underground facility underneath the nearby dry Papoose Lake) as a physicist. Lazar maintained that he had seen several disc-shaped craft in the subterranean bunker, and worked upon retroengineering the propulsion system of one of them before being terminated as a security risk. In support of his claims, several of Lazar’s acquaintances came forward testifying that he had taken them on nighttime excursions to view scheduled test flight of the craft. The resulting publicity was enough to generate a stream of UFO enthusiasts to the area, most of whom spent a night or two watching by the “Black Mailbox” (a landmark identified by Lazar and his friends) and a few who either stayed in the area or returned frequently. The latter – circulating accounts of their experiences through such media as the Internet and desktop publishing – produced in effect a small subculture, self-named the “Groom Lake Interceptors,” which codified a visit to the “Area 51” region as a ritual of active investigation, rather than passive consumption.

One thing that distinguishes “Area 51” from many other loci of conspiracy theory is that agents of the United States government are indeed unabashedly conspiring to conceal *something* there. Area 51 is, essentially, an open secret. Nellis AFB spokesman Maj. George Scilia says that there are “all kinds of” explanations for lights seen over the base, but “I’m not at liberty to discuss it, and to be honest, I don’t know who is” (S. Greene). Curtis Tucker, of the Bureau of Land Management, said that the Air Force’s request to withdraw access to Freedom Ridge and White Sides Mountain was “nonspecific;” “it basically gets down to there are some assets they don’t want people to see” (Good). In support of the petition, Nevada Representative James Bilbray, a Democrat serving on the House Armed Services Committee, told reporters:

Every time someone goes up on White Sides it costs taxpayers a lot of money...They have to cover up what they’re doing with camouflage netting or roll it into hangars. They have to wait until the people get off the mountain before they can go on with what they were doing, and that’s not fair. (Good).

As the seizure of White Sides demonstrates, the fact that there are inarguably real, possibly substantial secrets being kept here makes it both more attractive and less accessible to the suspicious or merely curious, inflecting any discussion of it with the speculative, unattributable tense that characterizes so much conspiracy theory discourse. This is visible even in mainstream news accounts, as when an article in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* explicates that the Groom Lake base “is where the

Aurora, a hypersonic spy plane is believed to be housed along with other high-speed, high-altitude aircraft that reportedly have been built with so-called 'black budget' government funds" (Rogers, "Spy"). The passive tense serves to avoid the fact that it is seldom entirely clear who, exactly, is "believing" and "reporting" such information. "The signal-to-noise ratio is very low here," is how one protester on Freedom Ridge phrased it to Patton (5). This might be a characteristic observation from an "interceptor" – a hobbyist devoted to using frequency scanners to listen in on military communications – but in this case, it was clearly not intended literally; Patton's contact was referring to "the absence of certain truth and the abundance of uncertain lore, legend and just plain 'rumint' [rumor intelligence], as the watchers on the Ridge liked to call it" (ibid., 5).

A few facts about the base's origins and early usage can be gleaned from Ben Rich's autobiographical book about his work with the Lockheed Skunk Works. In the early 1950s Lockheed and the CIA, scouting for a location to test fly the new U2 plane, discovered a dry lake bed nestled between the Groom Range mountains and the Atomic Energy Commission Proving Grounds (later the Nevada Test Site). The land was annexed by the Atomic Energy Commission, which divided its Nevada testing grounds into an irregular grid of numbered rectangles. However, no atomic bombs were ever detonated in the six-by-ten-mile box at the northeast corner of the site that Atomic Energy Commission maps labeled "Area 51." Neither has that sector ever come under the jurisdiction of the Nellis Air Force Base, which uses the land around it as bombing ranges and training grounds; the air space over Groom

Lake has been off-limits even to Air Force pilots since it was restricted via an Executive Order signed by Eisenhower in 1955. Since the U2, a number of other classified aviation projects, such as the A-12 Blackbird in the 1960s and the B-2 Stealth craft developed in the 1980s, have been test-flown from Groom Lake, under the combined administration of the CIA, the Air Force Flight Test Center, and defense contractors such as Lockheed and Bechtel.

Early in its history, the base relied largely on its remote location and a lack of public interest to keep it out of the public eye. In 1978, when John Lear, the estranged son of aviation mogul William Lear, decided to see the legendary “Ranch” for himself, he was able to drive his car very close to the base and photograph it. By 1984, however, the Air Force had annexed more of the public land surrounding the base and posted warnings against trespassing, effectively establishing a buffer which ensured that no public viewpoint existed closer than twelve miles. But the literal “no-man’s-land” around the edges of the Restricted Zone continues to draw the curious; by 1995, when the Air Force’s 1993 petition to redraw the boundaries to close off White Sides and Freedom Ridge was granted, Area 51 watchers had already discovered Tikaboo Peak, from which the base could still legally be seen at a distance of twenty-five miles.

Glenn Campbell was working as a computer programmer in Boston when he first encountered and became curious about rumors concerning a secret recovered-UFO program operating out of Area 51. When he visited Rachel, Nevada – the closest town to Groom Lake – in December of 1992, he met and was befriended by

Jim Goodall, who had become famous amongst aviation buffs by capturing a clear photograph of the then-mysterious Stealth fighter, and John Andrews, a model plane designer who had become the object of FBI investigation on two previous occasions by producing model kits of classified planes (the U2 in the 1960s and the Stealth in the 1980s). All three were paying guests of the Little A'Le'Inn, the motel, bar and grill in Rachel that represented the only food and lodging in the immediate area.



Fig. 20: The only public accommodations for miles (photo 1996 by Shelley McGinnis)

Goodall and Andrews told Campbell that they were “looking for their Holy Grail, the secret Aurora spyplane,” and had heard:

a loud sound, which they seemed to attribute to the plane. They were exuberant. They asked me if I had heard the sound, which they described as an incredibly loud roar.

“I guess so,” I said, searching my memory. Throughout the day, I had heard sonic booms and the roar of jets, but nothing that struck me as unusual. Then again, I wasn’t an experienced aviation watcher who could tell the difference between aircraft sounds... (Campbell, “Spy 1”).

The name “Aurora” derives from a mysterious project mentioned in Defense Department procurement documents for the 1986-87 financial year (Browne).

“Black” or undisclosed research programs represent about 16 percent of the Pentagon’s annual weapons acquisition budget (Lane), and speculation about black-budget planes is fairly frequent in aviation periodicals, including both slick commercial journals and self-published zines. Despite repeated denials of the existence of such a plane by the Air Force and other government agencies, sightings of a curious “doughnuts-on-a-rope” contrail were reported in *Aviation Week* (Lane) and of a “triangular shaped hypersonic jet” in *Jane’s Defence Weekly* (“Et Cetera”). Rumored to employ a “pulse-detonation engine” and reach speeds as high as Mach 6 or Mach 8, the Aurora was alleged to be behind “earth shaking sonic booms” nicknamed “airquakes” (Good) or “skyquakes” (Patton, 36) that were heard in Southern California and in the Mojave area in the early 1990s.

Black plane spotting is therefore one of the reasons people travel to this remote place. Phil Patton describes the thrill of meeting like-minded enthusiasts on Freedom Ridge:

There on the ridge above Dreamland, I would find I was not alone. My fascination was shared by many others.

Some were aircraft buffs, Skunkers, Stealth chasers, Interceptors, like my friend Steve [Douglass] from Texas, like the journalist called the Minister of Words, guys with self-bequeathed code-names like Agent X, Zero, Bat, Fox, and others. They were gathered here, trying to find out about rumoured, occasionally sighted, and sometimes only speculated on, planes called Aurora, Black Manta, Goldie and 'the mothership' (4)...

For the black plane watchers, Dreamland was simply the end of a corridor that ran back to the aerospace centre on the Antelope Valley, to Edwards AFB and Palmdale's factories. They were the suburbia of aerospace, to which the contractors moved from their original urban factories in Long Beach, Culver City, Burbank, and Santa Monica. Dreamland was the vacation house, the country place, where the serious hunting and fishing went on (18).

But while black-budget aircraft watching may be a more popular avocation than the uninitiated suspect, Aurora and Stealth chasers can't in themselves sustain much of a tourist industry. The area around Groom Lake likely would never have attracted much notice from Nevada tourism promoters had not Area 51 become, as Phil Patton (invoking the language of pilgrimage) terms it, a "leading UFO shrine" (4).

Early in his researches, Campbell was surprised and impressed when not only "UFO nuts" but "experienced aviation watchers" like Goodall and Andrews said that they believed that the government was testing UFOs in the Restricted Zone; it "was a major disruption to my neat conception of things" ("Spy 1"). Phil Patton has remarked upon "how weirdly the paradoxical worlds of real planes kept secret and imagined aircraft made public paralleled each other" (13), and indeed there is significant overlap between those interested in black budget terrestrial

aircraft and those interested in UFOs. Both often invoke the language of what one Area 51 watcher, Steve Hauser, calls “patriotic surveillance.” “I’m a real pain in the ass to my government because I’m not someone you can brush off,” says Jim Goodall, a sergeant with the Minnesota Air National Guard who sold his photo of the Stealth fighter to aviation journals while its existence was still classified (Good). “I’m spying for the American people,” Glenn Campbell said, “I don’t think you can trust any big organization without some controls on it. When you take that away, it becomes defending egos instead of the nation. If you take away the oversight, there’re bound to be abuses” (Rogers, “Spy”). Grace Bukowski, of the military watchdog group Rural Alliance for Military Accountability, agrees: “The real story at Groom Range is whether the people of the United States have lost control over the Pentagon and its funding of ‘black’ military projects...I think the answer is yes. They’re taking billions of taxpayers’ dollars and there’s no accountability as far as I can see” (S. Greene). As has already been seen in the case of Roswell, the desire to uncover secret government knowledge regarding UFOs is often also framed in terms of the people’s right to know.

A certain amount of UFO “buzz” hovered over Area 51 throughout the 1980s. Patton writes that as early as 1980, a Groom Lake employee identified only as “Mike” told a researcher for the Mutual UFO Network organization that he had seen a flying saucer at the base in 1962 (167). In 1988 the new Fox Network broadcast a special titled *UFO Cover-Up? Live!* which featured a disguised informant identified as “Condor,” who claimed that extraterrestrials had been given control of Area 51 as

part of an agreement with the government. Some ufologists believed Condor to be an agent of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations named Richard Doty, who had been suspected of conducting disinformation campaigns on other occasions (Patton, 197). In May of 1989, the Las Vegas CBS affiliate broadcast an interview with a man whose face was concealed and whose name was given only as “Dennis.” “Dennis” told reporter George Knapp that he was a physicist employed at a secret location near Area 51 to “reverse engineer” alien craft that had somehow come into the government’s possession.

None of these hints and allegations electrified the UFO research community, which is continuously awash in such slippery intelligence. However, the following November, Knapp broadcast a second interview with “Dennis,” who now relinquished his anonymity and repeated his claims under his real name, Robert Lazar. Lazar said that he had been employed at S4, a concealed underground facility a few miles away from the Groom Lake base, near the edge of the Papoose Lake dry bed. There he had seen nine disc-shaped craft that used an extraterrestrial element, “element 115,” to fuel gravity generators that allowed them to travel in ways impossible for terrestrial aircraft.

This is how Lazar explained the technology during an appearance on *The Billy Goodman Happening*, an AM radio talk show based in Las Vegas, on November 21st, 1989:

The craft have three gravity amplifiers on the bottom of them. What they do is, assuming that they’re in space –

it's just easier to get across this way – they will focus the three gravity amplifiers on the point that they want to go to. Now, to give you an analogy, if you take a thin rubber sheet, say, lay it on a table and put thumb tacks in each corner. You take a big stone and set it on one end of the rubber sheet and say that's your UFO or that's your spacecraft.

You pick out a point that you want to go to, which could be anywhere on the rubber sheet, pinch that point with your fingers, and pull that all the way up to the craft. That's how it focuses and pulls that point actually to it. When you then shut off the gravity generators, the stone or your spacecraft follows the stretched rubber back to its point. There's no linear travel through space. It actually bends space and time, and follows space as it retracts.

A few days later, on November 25th, the Las Vegas CBS affiliate combined the "Dennis" and Lazar interviews into a two-hour television special titled *UFOs: The Best Evidence*. Described by the program as a "former government scientist" and a "young scientist with eclectic interests," Lazar claimed that he received a call from his supervisor after his first appearance, asking, "do you have any idea what we're going to do you now?" The government, he said, was "trying to make me a non-person;" he had called "the schools that I went to, the hospital I was born at, past jobs, and essentially nothing comes up with my name." Knapp offered an example in support of this claim; while attempting to confirm Lazar's credentials, he had called the national research lab at Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Lazar claimed to have been employed prior to being recruited for the S4 project:

Los Alamos officials told us they had no record of a Robert Lazar ever working there; they were either

mistaken, or were lying. A 1982 phone book from the lab lists Lazar, right there among the other scientists and technicians...we called Los Alamos again. An exasperated official told us he still had no records on Lazar.

Whether a mistake, or another example of the sometimes pointless-seeming secrecy that perpetually surrounds high-security government research, this anomaly helps demonstrate why, in Glenn Campbell's words, Lazar's story was "impossible to confirm but also curiously difficult to refute" (7). This compelling narrative of a man targeted by a cover-up campaign continued to hover in the background as holes in the story began to emerge under the scrutiny of researchers – for example, despite Lazar's claim of master's degrees in physics and electronics from MIT and Cal-Tech, the schools had no record of his attendance. In a striking example of what Jameson described as the conspiracy theorist's "attempt – through the figuration of advanced technology – to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (1991: 38), black-budget plane watcher John Andrews argued, ""Credentials can disappear. MIT and Cal-Tech do a lot of business with the government" (Campbell, "Spy 1").

Although not immediately seized upon as major news, the story was picked up for distribution and gradually began to appear in the national and even international media. For example, in June of 1990 Lazar and Knapp were interviewed for *Inside Report*, a nationally syndicated television magazine program. "Before you toss Lazar onto the pile with all the other UFO wackos," the host, Dan

Hausle, enjoined viewers, "understand that he willingly agreed to take a lie detector test." The polygraph administrator was then interviewed, claiming, "If he's lying, he ought to be in Hollywood. Because he gave absolutely no physiological indications of attempting deception."



Fig. 21: Photos of George Knapp (top center) and Bob Lazar (top right) displayed on the wall of the Little A'Le'Inn (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis)

Quite a few people, both in the UFO community and outside of it, found Lazar's claims plausible, or at least intriguingly possible, for a number of reasons.

Interviewed for *Inside Report's* segment, Knapp said that:

I find Bob to be credible, and the main reason is, the story hasn't changed. It's stayed, from the beginning, it's been the same. It hasn't expanded like some of these UFO tales you hear, it's been the same. And we've been through a lot of interview sessions.

Stealth-chaser and model-plane designer John Andrews, who would produce a model kit of an “Area S4 UFO” based upon Lazar’s description (complete with “anti-matter reactor to bend space-time, fueled by element 115”), was impressed by “the fact that he was one of the few UFO witnesses to say ‘I don’t know.’ He refused to speculate on the source of the saucers, for instance” (Patton, 26). Andrews and Jim Goodall remarked to Glenn Campbell that:

... the story was internally consistent and also consistent with what they knew about the military. They didn’t think that Lazar could have made the story up, and they thought he would have no reason to. The story was too complex, and all of Lazar’s emotional responses were the correct ones for the circumstances. Lazar was not profiting from his story, hated the UFO believers and refused to travel on the UFO lecture circuit (where he could make some money), so what did he have to gain? (Campbell, “Spy 1”).

Campbell also found the story “coherent and well-crafted,” with “many plausible technical details” (*Guide*, 7), a statement that recalls Gillian Bennett's observation that a high degree of detail and specificity are indexes of a story “told as true” (1996: 17). More human details color the story as well, as in this bit of playful self-referentiality described by Phil Patton:

[Lazar] noticed that the security badges bore blue and white stripes and the legend Majic – “it made me crack a smile” – because it is straight out of the Lore: MJ12, the famed secret committee, Majestic...

“I don’t know whether it was a kind of nostalgia thing,” he commented. I began to wonder is this really the

Majestic everyone talks about, or was it something done almost for nostalgia reasons...Assuming the Majestic 12 documents were false, did these guys just use this insignia for the hell of it, kind of as a joke?" (32).

In support of his claims, Lazar's friend Gene Huff came forward, testifying that he had accompanied Lazar, Lazar's wife Tracy, and mutual friend John Lear on nighttime excursions to view scheduled test flights of the craft. They had been taken down a desert highway so uninhabited that a rancher's mailbox was the only human landmark. Guided a short ways down an unmarked road by Lazar, they had parked and observed a light in the sky which moved in ways that would be impossible for a conventional airplane. In a synopsis of his experiences posted to the usenet group alt.conspiracy.area51 in 1995, Huff recalls that:

The first Wednesday, March 22, 1989, we arrived right at dusk, turned our lights off, and went in about 5 mile on the Groom Lake road. Soon we saw a bright light rise above the mountains which were between us and S4. The light began jumping and dancing around, doing step moves in the sky, then would come to a dead stop and hover, etc. It repeated this type of activity for a few minutes which was thrilling, but it was so far away, we could only see so much. This activity by the object was blatant and it wasn't our eyes playing tricks on us with starlight and planet light being distorted by the atmosphere or clouds, or anything of that sort.

A week later, Huff went again with the Lazars to watch a "test," and the display was even more remarkable:

At first it seemed far away, then you'd blink and it would seem a lot closer, then you'd blink again and it would seem a LOT closer. It wasn't the same sensation as seeing a set of headlights on a car or landing lights on a jet approach you at nighttime. There was no sense of continual movement toward you, it just sort of "jumps" toward you and this is very alarming to your brain.

Talk radio host Billy Goodman, who had Lazar as a guest on several occasions and expressed a fair amount of enthusiasm for his story, recounts that after Lazar's first appearance on his program:

We took a group of people up there, about 200-some-odd people, and I was up there with them. I sat in the desert, and I watched, here's how I could describe it. Now, picture the 29 ½ mile marker, and we're looking out at these peaks, and there's nothing going on at all. All of a sudden, you look over the peak, and something comes up, and sort of almost appears over the peak. It's just a light, and you watch this light and you see it doing zigzags, literally moving down and then coming about.

A caller to the same program described his own excursion:

Last Saturday night, my cousin and I were out at Groom Lake, and we saw from the peaks that I think you were describing, Billy, a very similar experience. We saw the light originate over the top of the mountains, then streak out to what looked like, it looked like about a half a mile away from us, and then it just vanished. It lasted for about seven to ten seconds. And then my cousin saw another sighting that was off to the south where your guest described the site...

And what was weird about it is, that I got out the camera and I was just about ready to take a picture of this thing and it vanished. It, like, it vanished from the center out.

It became transparent, and then all of a sudden it was gone.

As the anecdotes from the *Billy Goodman* program quoted above demonstrate, Lazar's story almost immediately began bringing people to the location he and Huff described – mile marker 29.5 on Nevada State Route 375, where a dirt road turnoff is marked only by a lone mailbox – to watch for lights in the sky. Lazar said that the saucers were test-flown on Wednesday nights – “statistically, it's the night of least traffic in that area” (*Billy Goodman*), and as Glenn Campbell says, “religious tenet among watchers says that flying saucers are tested here on Wednesday nights...Conventional wisdom contends that some sort of display, known among watchers as ‘Old Faithful,’ shows up reliably around 4:50 am every Thursday morning” (*Guide*, 9).

Nevada State Route 375 is a 98 mile stretch of two lane blacktop that branches off of U.S. 93 about 80 miles north of Las Vegas and meets U.S. 6 at Warm Springs. Most of the land around the highway, like much land in Nevada, is held in public trust and used by a small number of ranchers – including Steve Medlin, who holds the grazing rights south of the highway and whose mailbox, situated at the fork in the road that leads to the Groom Lake base, would become what may be the most photographed mailbox in America. At the western end of the route, toward Warm Springs, lie a couple of alfalfa farms. In between, the only human habitation is Rachel, incorporated in 1978 to house workers at the Groom tungsten mine. The mine closed in 1988, but Rachel, a scattering of mostly mobile homes anchored at

one end by a convenience store and at the other by a bar and grill, retained about a hundred inhabitants. Joe and Pat Travis, the owners of the Rachel Bar and Grill, in 1989 renamed their establishment the Little A'Le'Inn and began selling alien-themed souvenirs to a clientele that had doubled due to the increase in out-of-town visitors (Campbell, "Spy 1").



Fig. 22: Inside the Little A'Le'Inn: UFO displays and a rack of T-shirts for sale (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis)

Upon first visiting the Little A'Le'Inn in 1992, Glenn Campbell found it "a charming slice of Americana" ("Spy 1"); but while not begrudging the owners' desire to capitalize on their new clientele, he almost immediately concluded that many visitors to Rachel had needs that were not being met by conventional

souvenir-shop tourism, and conceived the idea of writing a guide to assist those with a more active interest in exploration and investigation. An encounter with a group of tourists led by Sean Morton, a professional psychic who had begun operating a commercial “tour in which UFO sightings were virtually guaranteed” (ibid.), convinced him further that his guide was a worthwhile project:

Visitors like this, I figured, could use my *Viewer's Guide*. Instead of paying a couple of hundred dollars to Sean, they could buy my document for only a few dollars and get a lot more information. I did not want my clients to be ill prepared. If they were going to hunt for UFOs and pursue other mysteries, then I wanted them to at least have the knowledge that was already available (“Spy 1”).

In January of 1993, Campbell decided to move to Rachel, where he established the Area 51 Research Center, a mobile home out of which he published his *Area 51 Viewer's Guide* and his Web site, *ufomind*.



Fig. 23: The Area 51 Research Center in 1996 (photo by Shelley McGinnis)

Campbell's *Guide*, a 115–page document that sold for \$15 plus shipping, describes itself as:

. . . a guide not to UFOs themselves but to the many practical matters concerning the hunt for aerial objects in the vicinity of the “Black Mailbox” . . . this document reviews the geography of the region, the references available, local accommodations and services and many other practical topics of interest to visitors (3).

The *Guide* is very conscientious to warn readers contemplating a trip to Nevada about the dangers – legal and physical – they might encounter. “Short of being shot,” he writes (in reference to the “use of deadly force authorized” warnings on the posted signs at the entrance to the Restricted Zone), “the maximum theoretical penalty for intrusion is one year imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine, although a misdemeanor fine of \$600 is the norm” (*Guide*, 12). While acknowledging that there are no incidents on record of the patrolling security guards (or “cammo dudes,” as they are called by those in the know, after their camouflage uniforms) using “deadly force” or even nonlethal violence on trespassers, Campbell advises his readers to bear in mind that the cammo dudes

. . . have no responsibility to please the public and are accountable for their actions only to the military. The military, in turn, does not acknowledge that they exist. Although evasive as field mice under relaxed circumstances, you would not want to get on their bad side. These guards have the guns, brawn and anonymity to do what they want, and there aren't many witnesses

out here to say that you were right and they were wrong
(*Guide*, 11).

Still, he notes, the usual procedure of the cammo dudes who encounter trespassers is to call the county sheriff and have them arrested; in fact, as Campbell discovered, at least some of the dudes – who are apparently private security guards hired by defense contractors – have been deputized by the Lincoln County Sheriff's department, presumably in order to make the legal process of arrest, detention, and confiscation of cameras and film less legally ambiguous.

The greater danger of physical harm, the *Guide* advises, comes not from the cammo dudes but from the environment itself: "The saucer nut's greatest enemy is himself if he does not understand his own limitations and the natural dangers of the desert . . . Nevada is a land of freedom and self-reliance, and that includes the freedom to sabotage yourself without any hope of rescue" (13). Throughout its pages are repeated warnings – often in large or bold fonts – to be wary of getting lost, of car trouble, of heat stroke and dehydration. While providing a map and instructions for hiking up Tikaboo Peak – the closest remaining vantage point with a view of the base, after the withdrawal of White Sides and Freedom Ridge – Campbell cautions that "the hike is strenuous and not appropriate for most casual visitors" (11).

Campbell's concern is not just for the visitor, however. He also warns against ugly tourist behavior, reminding the reader that:

Plenty of loony people have come here spouting a lot of exotic theories, and this may result in a natural reluctance of many residents to discuss the matter. The few residents who work across the line are barred by oath from discussing anything there, so don't bother them. Visitors are welcome here as long as they adhere to a commonsense respect for residents' privacy and property (*Guide*, 13).

Of the ranching family whose mailbox is such a popular destination, he says, "Do not pester the Medlins with questions and don't do anything that would be annoying to you if you were in their shoes" (*Guide*, 12). In 1996, Steve Medlin, not unreasonably alarmed by his mailbox's increasing celebrity, replaced his old black model with a white steel cube (which is still referred to as the Black Mailbox by visitors).



Fig. 24: The original Black Mailbox (photo from *New York Sunday Times Magazine*, June 24, 1994).

The new box, perhaps ironically intended to be tourist-proof, seems in fact the opposite. In my search for Area 51 related photos, I have come across perhaps ten photos of the white Black Mailbox for every photo of the black original. The few photos of the original box, the same box that witnessed the clandestine trips of Bob Lazar and his friends to watch strange lights in the sky, tend to frame it as a stark landmark in a field of empty desert, suggesting some of the aura it must have held for the early UFO pilgrims who came to see it. The new mailbox gets much less reverential treatment; its square white surface seems to invite many visitors to leave their own messages, so that in every photo it is covered with dense graffiti.



Fig. 25: The white "Black Mailbox" (photo 1996 by Shelley McGinnis)

Most anthropological studies suppose a clear distinction between visitor and host, with the tourist destination, whether a site of authenticity or surface spectacle, representing other times and cultures, the exotic and/or the historic. Rachel, Nevada, however, doesn't lend itself to clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders – most everyone there has come from somewhere else. For Campbell, the key distinction seems to be between the seeker after truth and what Lucy Lippard characterizes as the “hip postmodern tourist [who] wallows in inauthenticity” (1988: 107). This division between the tourist and the serious researcher plays out across issues of perception and interpretation; through their continuous or repeated experience of and familiarity with the area, Campbell and his fellow “serious” researchers felt they had come to know this place with a depth and complexity that evades a casual tourist, who is perpetually in danger of misinterpreting what is seen, having no context upon which to base an accurate understanding. “I lived in Rachel full time for over two years,” Campbell writes, and

I have spent countless days and nights in the desert and have seen a lot of spectacular lights associated with military exercises, but I have never seen any object in the sky that I did not have a prosaic explanation for. At the same time, many UFO minded tourists have come to the area for only one night and seen UFOs everywhere (*Guide*, 8).

As an illustration, Campbell refers to the example of “Old Faithful,” a light seen from the Black Mailbox by many Wednesday-night UFO watchers “around 4:50 am every Thursday morning;” this time, he reveals, “happens to coincide with the first

daily Boeing 737 jet bringing workers from Las Vegas to Groom Lake. The flight approaches from the south with bright landing lights on, often moving directly toward the watchers at the Black Mailbox so that it seems to be ‘hovering’ in the air without moving” (*Guide*, 9). Unlike the neophyte Black Mailbox watchers, the “Groom Lake Interceptors” – Glenn Campbell, John Andrews, Jim Goodall, Tom Mahood, and other committed Area 51 watchers – filtered their perceptions through extensive knowledge of regular military craft and operations, experience with the tricks of perception involved in tracking a moving light in the sky, knowledge of the effects produced by specific atmospheric and geographical qualities of the region, knowledge of the local people and what interests they represent, and familiarity with the terrain that allows them to see into the Restricted Zone from multiple vantage points. This “insider’s” visual knowledge was called into play in 1997, when *Popular Mechanics* published an article on Area 51 featuring a photo captioned as “the gate to Area 51.” Dale Punter posted to the Area 51 mailing list that “the actual location of the photo is the north perimeter fence of Range 61 in R-4896W. The photo is facing south, away from Area 51.”

As Phil Patton observes, “UFOs have been a big topic on the Internet from the beginning, a place the youfers [UFO buffs] could gather without fear of the common derision” (133). The “Area 51” mailing list and the usenet discussion group alt.conspiracy.area51 were important fora amongst Area 51 watchers for discussion and collaboration. Patton cites just one example:

Campbell had previously learned that some mail to Area 51 was directed to "Pittman Station, Henderson". Henderson is a town just east of Las Vegas – it was the site of a defunct post office that once received mail for the base. One buff plugged "Pittman Station" into the Alta Vista web searcher. It came back with a 1990 NASA press release listing astronaut candidates. Pittman Station was cited as the place of employment of a Captain Carl E. Walz.

Another buff then did a search for "Walz" on the web and came up with a detailed NASA biography. There you could read that Walz's parents lived in South Euclid, Ohio, and that they had graduated from Charles T. Brush High School, Lyndhurst, Ohio. You could also find that: "In July 1987 he was transferred to Las Vegas, Nevada, where he served as a Flight Test Program Manager at Detachment 3, Air Force Flight Test Center [AFFTC]." The Air Force Flight Test Center is located at Edwards Air Force Base, apparently with a detached unit at Groom Lake, with a Pittman Station mail drop: Walz had apparently worked in Dreamland (134).

Unlike Glenn Campbell, Tom Mahood has professed openly a lack of interest in governmental secrets per se. "My interest in this weird business has been very specific," he writes, "It was, to find out for myself, if we are really operating alien based craft out the Groom area" ("Finis"). His researches focused on the personal and professional history of Bob Lazar; and as he says on his web page, "The Bob Lazar Corner,"

Unfortunately, I eventually came to the conclusion that his story is quite false. I say unfortunately, because I like a good saucer story as well as the next guy, and it would be really great if it were true...

But that's just my opinion, and that shouldn't matter a whole lot to you. I would much prefer you to think for yourself! So have a look at some of this stuff, do some more reading, ask a few questions, and decide for yourself.

The "stuff" Mahood invites the web surfer to look at here is the series of meticulously-argued posts made by him to the alt.conspiracy.area51 group that earned him the nickname "the Lazar Assassin" (Campbell, "Interceptors"), along with correspondingly detailed replies posted by Lazar's friend and defender Gene Huff. At issue were such topics as "The Birth Certificate: A Look at Lazar's 'Vanishing' Birth Records," "Education: A Look at Lazar's Claimed Educational Background," "Discoverer of 115: Lazar's Claimed Contribution to the Program, Identifying Element 115 (Or Not)," and "Omicron Mode Operation: Some Nit Picks on Lazar's Description of the Craft's Hovering Operation."

Mahood's Internet contributions also include reports and photographs concerning his "perhaps 40-50" visits to the Groom lake area, allowing a cyber-traveler to vicariously participate in exploring the boundaries of the Restricted Zone. Here he describes a January trip up Mt. Stirling to try to photograph the Papoose Lake area:

I took a lot of photos of both Nye Canyon and Papoose, but they mostly turned out very disappointing. It looks as if the camera malfunctioned after a while due to the cold. Also, the quality of shots throughout the scope left a lot desired. I also malfunctioned due to the cold. After a few hours, I was shivering so hard I couldn't get a steady view through the scope, so it was time to leave . . . Squatting in the snow, high on the side of a mountain, in

the cold wind, taking lousy photos of something that isn't even there in the first place, brings a remarkable clarity of thought ("Big Buildings").

On his Web site, *Desert Secrets*, Steve Hauser agreed that "Photographing secret bases continues to become an increasingly challenging sport." Hauser has been one of the most avid photographers of the area, and the most conscientious about documenting and publishing both his methods and his results. He describes using a T-adaptor and T-ring to connect a Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope lens to a standard 35 mm camera or video camera to acquire images at extreme magnification. The degree of technological erudition involved in "telephotographic surveillance" is quite far from popular "point-and-click" photography, as illustrated by this detailed discussion of the benefits of using a closed circuit video camera:

First, you can readily capture moving objects that otherwise might go unnoticed. Second, on a 60-minute video tape you can record the equivalent of more than 100,000 still images, the video camera recording 30 frames every second. Third, if your exposure is off, the video can be readily imported into your computer via the camera's firewire port and adjusted as required. Fourth, you don't have to worry about dust or scratches, which are a common occurrence with film. Fifth, you can view what you've captured in the time it takes to rewind the tape and hit "play," while you're still on scene. On the down side, air movement is readily apparent in televideographic imagery, though somewhat less so in cool weather and early in the day.

Black and white CCTV cameras are typically available at higher resolution and lower cost than color CCTV cameras. Most color CCTV cameras do not have

resolution in excess of 480 horizontal lines, while affordable black and white CCTV cameras are available with 570 lines of horizontal resolution. The resolution consideration may be a relatively trivial one as well, though, given that the resolution of affordable video recording formats generally does not exceed 500 lines. Black and white CCTV cameras also tend to perform better in low-light conditions, thereby extending your observation window. CCTVs come with CCDs of various sizes. 1/3 inch is the most common CCD size and is fully adequate for the task at hand. Bear in mind that a 1/3 inch CCD is smaller than a frame of 35mm film, so your field of view will be smaller than had you connected an SLR to your SCT.

This conscientious sharing of “insider” know-how reflects the democratic/populist philosophy undergirding Hauser’s “patriotic countersurveillance” and the interceptor culture in general; however, it also suggests a need to “verify” the images produced through extensive documentation. Hauser situates each of his images carefully, for example, captioning one, “I made this exposure from the dirt road which intersects NV 375 south of the LN 22 milepost, heading west toward Bald Mountain.” He also describes his techniques in detail: the film used, the lens used, methods used to stabilize the lens, sometimes even the brand of developer used and the paper the image was printed on. Photographs constitute a privileged category of evidence, and Phil Patton has noted that “those watching for secret planes and those watching for alien craft appeared alike in their fascination and their procedures, in their careful accumulation of bits of knowledge, their descriptions of sightings, and above all, their elusive dreams of a clear view, a clear video image, a clear photograph” (5).

But Jodi Dean has observed that because “the UFO discourse is constructed around uncertain evidence, evidence of something that may not be there at all, its reports, cases, and files are primarily about the witnesses and only secondarily about the witnessed” (1998: 32). This emphasis on credibility, of the situated nature of knowledge claims, extends to the realm of photographs, so that it becomes necessary to pay attention to who took the photo and how. “Scattered throughout the Little A’Le’Inn,” Glenn Campbell writes, “are many snapshots taken by visitors, each as vague and unsatisfying as the next. A blob or squiggle of light in the middle of a dark photo could have a lot of explanations and does not prove anything to a stranger” (*Guide*, 19).



Fig. 26: UFO photos adorn the walls of the Little A’Le’Inn (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis)

This do-it-yourself hunt for the ultimate vantage was somewhat trumped by the availability of commercial satellite images. Tom Mahood says that “in the absence of making a trip to Papoose, satellite photos provide the next best thing.” In the early 1990s, a recently privatized Russian satellite program began offering its images on the open market. A 1988 image of the Groom Lake base found a number of customers in the United States—a section of it was used in a 1994 article in *Popular Science* and on the cover of the novel *The Espionage Game*, for example. The cost (reportedly about \$1,000) was too prohibitive for most private citizens, but Mahood obtained a copy, as apparently did Bob Lazar. What made the complete satellite photo a worthwhile investment to both of these men was likely not the section depicting the runway and small cluster of hangars at Groom Lake – the part of the photo which had been reproduced in the magazine and on the novel cover. Despite their official “nonexistence,” these facilities were fairly well documented. What had never been available for public scrutiny was the area around Papoose Lake, which Lazar had named as the location of the entrance to the underground facility S4, where the UFOs were kept. But Lazar and Mahood’s “readings” of the image differed on a number of points. Bob Lazar’s website site claimed that the Soviet 1988 photos “shows roads that lead into nearby hills where Lazar said the discs were stored. Parked buses with blacked-out windows are shown near the hangar area” (evoking Lazar’s claim that he was driven from Groom Lake to S4 in such a bus). Mahood, on the other hand, says definitively that “there’s nothing there! Absolutely nothing.” He elaborates:

A facility such as Lazar described would have to leave traces easily visible on a photo with the resolution of this one. Even assuming the facility is hidden in the hills, there is no sign of an access road (which Lazar described as good), no sign of a fenced area (and the accompanying marking of terrain it would leave), no sign of terrain scuffing from people walking around or even from hauling discs out of the hangars onto the lake. It's not as if these things won't show up on the photo, as they do in other areas near Groom. Guard vehicle turnaround spots on the dirt roads are clearly seen.

The photo is also clear enough to easily make out all the dirt roads down to the 4wd level. By using the main access roads around Groom as a reference, it's obvious which are the good roads and which are not. The road running down to Papoose Lake on the west side of the Papoose Range, appears to be a very poor road, except for the most northerly portion. The road deteriorates as it nears Papoose Lake, and dumps into the north end of the lake bed itself. There are a few 4wd routes crossing the lake, but nothing approaches the likely location of S-4 ("Finis").

In 1997, Glenn Campbell began offering for sale, through his Area 51 Research Center and *ufomind* website, a 16"x 24" poster of a satellite image obtained "from an indirect source." The \$5 poster, which includes both Groom Lake and Papoose Lake, made a "generous source of intelligence data" available to almost any interested party, in effect once again inviting the curious to judge for themselves.

In the discourse of the Groom Lake Interceptors, critical thinking – in both cyberspace and real space - is a key distinction between the serious researcher and the sort of UFO buffs who "come here on a Wednesday night, see a few ambiguous lights, and it confirms their whole worldview" (Campbell, *Guide*, 35). In 1996,

Campbell served as the organizer and driving force behind the opposition to a plan by the state of Nevada to more aggressively “market the state’s attractions;” specifically, to sell State Route 375 as a tourist destination by renaming it the “Extraterrestrial Highway” and staging publicity events in Rachel to celebrate the new name.

Perhaps inspired by the success of Roswell’s 1995 UFO Festival, Assemblyman Bob Price first proposed the name change as part of a state legislature bill, but state senate Transportation Chairman Bill O’Donnell allowed the bill to die without a hearing, saying, “I don’t have time for frivolity” (Vogel, “No Hope”). The Transportation Board agreed to make the change, however, provided that local merchants paid the cost of \$3,360 for the four “Extraterrestrial Highway” signs, and helped ensure that, as Transportation Director Thomas Stephens said, “they aren’t stolen every five minutes” (“Extraterrestrial Highway”).

Lt. Governor Lonnie Hammargren helped work out a cross promotion with the producers of a forthcoming alien-invasion film, *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996), which had not only “spent a few weeks on location in arid West Wendover,” Nevada, but “thanks to movie magic,” allowed the state to “play a much bigger role” by creating an “Area 51” set at an aircraft facility in Southern California (Cling). Several of the stars of *Independence Day*, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman, Robert Loggia and Brent Spiner, travelled to Rachel for a dedication ceremony to officially rename the highway, as did a number of big names in ufology, including “Don Ecker, research director of *UFO Magazine* and host of “UFOs Tonight”” Vick Cooper,

publisher of *UFO Magazine*; Walter Andrus Jr., director of Mutual UFO Network Inc., and George Knapp, a Las Vegas television reporter and expert on Area 51” (Puppel). Hammargren characterized the decision this way: “Anything we can do to promote tourism is wonderful . . . we do have a sense of humor in Nevada” (Vogel, "Rural Road").



Fig. 27: "Extraterrestrial Highway" sign decorated by visitors (photo 1996 by Shelley McGinnis)

This leap from the commercial repackaging of conspiracy theory to displaying a "sense of humor" (or "frivolity," as Senator O'Donnell would say) about it is one source of dissatisfaction among serious Area 51 watchers, as in the case of the unidentified Freedom Ridge protestor who complained that media

coverage of Area 51 was “more like a Dean Martin celebrity roast than a real look at what’s going on out there” (S. Greene). But such repackaging is not simply a matter of re-framing the investigation of serious questions as amusing entertainment, but often a postmodern blurring of any distinction between the two. Campbell complains that:

There are a few intelligent UFO stories emanating from the military area that I think deserve serious attention . . . That is different from the claim – fostered by the less reputable media and by a certain local merchant – that you can come here to this remote desert highway and see flying saucers on demand. This is ridiculous (*Guide*, 3).

A brochure published by the Nevada Commission on Tourism seems, at first glance, to make just such a “ridiculous” promise: the large illustration on the front depicts a flying saucer hovering over a highway, as seen through the windshield of a car. But, unsurprisingly, the promotional materials put out by the Commission have a sly, winking quality that turn the “Extraterrestrial Highway” into a shared joke, recalling the very similar approach taken by the New Mexico Department of Tourism in exploiting the Roswell incident. In exchange for receipts from two local businesses and a report of a strange encounter, the Board will send a traveler E.T. Highway swag, such as a bumper sticker reading “I Was Out There” (a play on the *X-Files* catchphrase “the truth is out there”). Submitted stories must be true, the brochure warns, and must not be embroidered “except to make the story better.” “The ‘Alien Highway’ is a myth that, regrettably, I helped create by drawing

attention to this area,” Campbell wrote, and while tourism “serves the human need for rituals and things to buy... it does not bring us any closer to the truth” (*Guide*, 3).

It has become a standard parting ritual, for visitors brave enough, to drive up Groom Lake road to the edge of the Restricted Zone to snap a photo of the signs warning that photography at that point is prohibited. This pilgrimage does not appeal to everyone; researching a 1997 travel article for a motorcycle magazine, Bill Heald visited Rachel and the Black Mailbox, but concluded: “I don’t recommend riding down this dirt road toward Dreamland, though, because all the lengthy round trip will get you is a dirty motorcycle and a sign that tells you they’ll kill you if you go any farther” (40).



Fig. 28: Photography is prohibited (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis).

But a photo of a sign reading "Photography Is Prohibited," with the institutional force of military and government authority behind it, allows tourists to participate, in a small way, in the larger project of "patriotic surveillance." It represents, metonymically, the area beyond the signs –what might be called, after Goffman (1956), the "back region" of America – a region that conflates with Buck-Morss's "wild zone" of power, the "terrain in which the exercise of power is out of control of the masses, veiled from public scrutiny, arbitrary and absolute" (2002:2). To take such a photo represents a small but real danger, of being detained, fined, and possibly having one's film confiscated by the patrolling security forces. Or, at least, it did at one time. When I visited in October of 2003, a tour guide who ran occasional tours to Rachel from Las Vegas told me that the base had made peace with its celebrity to the extent that the cammo dudes now watch, but do not interfere, with picture takers who go no further than the signs.



Fig. 29: The parting ritual (photo 2003 by Shelley McGinnis)

And such proved to be my experience.

Chapter 5: Civil Pilgrims and the "Powers That Be"

In the introduction, I mentioned G. T. Cubitt's concept of "conspiracy myth" to describe a discourse that proved more flexible, elaborate, and enduring than the average ephemeral conspiracy theory, a "story which people take to be true, and which they use as the key to an understanding of the way things are or happen" (1989:13); and I noted that the discourses surrounding these sites that have attracted conspiracy-related tourism achieve the status of "conspiracy myth." I also noted, in my discussion of the narrative offered by "Kenneth," that such elaborate mythology often demonstrates a tension between the specific – an abundance of facts and "evidence" – and the more tenuous, shifting connections that the conspiracy framework attempts to draw to place these facts into an overarching narrative. The shifting and speculative nature of these connections can result in a blurring or overlapping between formerly distinct mythologies. This is particularly visible in the cases of Roswell and Area 51, the two towering "milestones or big stories of UFO history" on Matt Holm and Jon Follett's "Gray Highway" of UFO hotspots; understandably so, as these two locations share themes of extraterrestrial visitation and military concealment. What's more, these narratives dovetail nicely, with Roswell's legend built upon missing UFO wreckage, and Area 51's upon recovered UFOs of indeterminate origin. Thus, while the earliest witness accounts collected by

UFO researchers at Roswell implied that the wreckage from one or more crashed UFOs was transported from Roswell to military bases in Texas and/or Ohio, Nevada's Area 51 is frequently supposed to be the final resting place of Roswell's wreckage in both popular culture and UFO lore. An example of the former would be *Independence Day*, the 1996 science fiction movie in which a crashed Roswell UFO, stored at Area 51, proves instrumental in protecting the earth from alien invasion. Wendelle Stevens, the Arizona-based organizer of the 1991 International UFO Congress held in Las Vegas, told reporters that he chose that location for the conference because of its proximity to Area 51, where he believed that "bodies found at the Roswell crash site are in 'deep cryogenic storage'" (Burbank); while some Area 51 watchers observed by Phil Patton nicknamed the largest hangar at the Groom Lake base Hangar 18, after the hangar at Wright-Patterson in Ohio mentioned by Roswell informants as where the "crashed saucers and recovered alien bodies" were taken after being airlifted out of Roswell (Patton, 8).

But even such seemingly discrete events as the JFK assassination and UFO cover-ups can, in conspiracy mythology, exhibit signs of overlap. While observing Jim Marrs's "JFK Advanced Study Group," Stacey Freedenthal noted that "the men and women in the Tuesday class were skeptical about many things, not just the JFK assassination. A man in the front row was reading a book on UFOs and aliens. Mr. Mosley sported a button that read 'Koreish today. Tomorrow your church.'" ("Conspiracy Weary"). Cheyenne Turner, head of the Dallas chapter of the Mutual UFO Network, booked the Zapruder film specialist Robert Groden as the first guest

speaker for a lecture series titled "Eclectic Viewpoint," which promised "a forum of extraordinary science, unusual phenomena, and diverse viewpoints" (Powell, "Timing"). Such blurring supports Jodi Dean's assertion that "widespread dispersion of paranoia" has "supplanted focused targets" (1998: 8). Peter Knight has also observed a tendency of conspiracy theories to open onto other conspiracy theories in an "infinite hermeneutic of suspicion" (2000: 28). At the very least, the overlapping, all-inclusive trend in conspiracy mythology supports Jameson's argument that conspiracy theory has come to represent, not a perceived exception in the smooth, transparent operation of the world, but a cognitive map of the normal operation of power as "a potentially infinite network" (1992: 9); see, for example, ufologist Stanton Friedman's claim that if the top-secret "Majestic-12" is a hoax, "there must be something very similar in existence" (Berliner and Friedman, 58).

The widespread embrace of conspiracy theory by the American public is frequently mentioned in both academic and journalistic accounts that cite survey results that "83 percent of Americans reject the Warren Commission's finding" (Anders, "Finally") and "65 percent believe a UFO crashed at Roswell" (Dean, 1998: 4). The popular acceptance or interest in conspiracy theory is manifested at ground level at the locations studied in the preceding chapters – in the form of flesh-and-blood visitors and the dollars that they spend. But just as academia and the mainstream press generally continue to take for granted the inherent disreputability of conspiracy theory, so do the "powers that be" (to use Roswell entrepreneur John Price's words) – the community members who make most of the decisions about

how their community will be represented to tourists – frequently display a strong ambivalence about embracing conspiracy theory as part of their community’s identity. As Price found in 1991, “The whole UFO field was a stigma and the powers that be didn’t appreciate Roswell being at the forefront of it” (*Roswell*, 17). This aura of disreputability is what leads Jodi Dean to describe UFO belief as “‘of the fringe’ though no longer ‘on the fringe’” (1998: 10); the discourse remains marginalized, despite the profusion of evidence that it circulates so widely. In the case of Dallas, we have seen how a tension – between the imperative to “properly” memorialize Kennedy, and the sense of obligation to represent the public in the official site of commemoration as embodied by the Sixth Floor Museum – has led to the limited inclusion of conspiracy theory. While the “UFO stigma” mentioned by Price – with its associations of “pseudoscience” and the “paranormal” – is undoubtedly more severe than harmless crackpot-ism attached to the “JFK loons” (Powell, “Look Up”), promoters of Roswell and Area 51 as tourist destinations also don’t feel the heavy cultural onus to be properly “reverent” that weighs on the city burdened by the murder of a president.

Thus, we see the adoption, in both Roswell and Area 51 tourism, of a “winking,” playful approach that is also quite typical of pop culture’s use of conspiracy theory. This form of pastiche is visible in “postmodern” television programs such as *The X-Files*, as in an episode titled “Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man,” in which the show’s recurrent villain is revealed to be the real gunman in the JFK assassination. Television in the post-network era has

refashioned itself across its multiplying channels to emphasize marketing, demographics, and a form of consumption that encourages its increasingly fragmented audiences to collate a sense of identity with a particular market niche and pleasure with being fluent consumers of images, and this episode's reenactment of the assassination borrows imagery that would be familiar to some viewers from the Zapruder film, including the presence alongside the motorcade route of a spectator with a large black umbrella (who in the *X-Files* version is a conspirator who uses his umbrella to signal the gunman). As the episode continues, the same villain claims to have been behind many other controversial events of the century, down to rigging the Oscars and the Superbowl.

The X-Files thus also demonstrates how the post-Fordist logic of flexible accumulation co-opts and neutralizes oppositional discourses. The serial narrative had some potentially explosive elements, in its depiction of an American government plotting against, manipulating, and even killing its own people. But this is framed in a playful, self-conscious way that encourages viewers to consume a "paranoid" perspective as "entertainment." This strategy, so successful in interpellating television audiences, has also been adapted to the purpose of place-branding: in 2001, the minor league baseball team the Las Vegas Stars changed its name to the Vegas 51s and adopted an alien mascot, who, a company "biography" claims, was recently released from captivity at Area 51. "Because Cosmo was confined to an underground bunker during his stay at Area 51," the promotional copy reads, "he loves people, especially kids" (Przybys). This narrativization of a

rather dark, potentially subversive theme – decades of secret imprisonment by the United States government – for the purpose of “family entertainment” demonstrates how thoroughly the potentially oppositional elements of conspiracy culture can be recuperated by mainstream culture for its own purposes.

In the original edition of *The Tourist*, published in 1976, Dean MacCannell made a compelling argument that tourism represents a quest for an “authenticity” absent from modern everyday life. Some recent studies have taken up the phenomenon of a more postmodern form of tourism that rejects any notion of authenticity in favor of consumption of places packaged as entertainment: George Ritzer and Allen Liska, for example, have argued that tourism is increasingly characterized by a process of “McDisneyization,” in which tourists are encouraged to “seek travel experiences that are merely reflections of their normally dehumanized, superficial, and inauthentic lives” (1997: 19). Michael Sorkin, similarly, uses the term “Disneyfication” to describe the “weaving of ever more elaborate fabrics of simulation” and “successive displacements of ‘authentic’ signifiers” (1992: 229) that characterize the postmodern transformation of cities. And Dennis Judd argues that increased competition for tourists has led to many communities being “rebuilt to project an overtly nostalgic and idealized version” of their self-identified “heritage” for greater marketability (1999: 42). The smiling cartoon aliens that adorn Roswell’s Chamber of Commerce publications and the “sense of humor” displayed by Nevada officials in promoting the “Extraterrestrial Highway” certainly seem to exemplify this model, which allows these community

representatives to call upon the drawing power of available conspiracy narratives without, they seem to hope, the full stigma of “taking it seriously.” Does such an approach meet the desires of the tourists themselves? Possibly, to an extent. The profusion of *X-Files* related graffiti (DUCHOVNY RULES; THE TRUTH SUCKS) that constantly appears on the Black Mailbox certainly suggests a willingness on the part of some visitors to see their trip in such a context.

But tourists seeking a seamless immersion in a packaged “experience” are likely to be disappointed in any of the locations discussed in these chapters – to wind up wondering, like travel writer Bill Heald, at the point of a “lengthy round trip” for nothing but “a sign that tells you they’ll kill you if you go any farther” (40). Whatever the seeming promises of promotional brochures, downtown Roswell is not a tourist enclave, and Nevada State Route 375 is certainly no Disneyland. MacCannell’s depiction of tourism as a quest for the authentic may be rightly challenged in many instances, but I think the evidence of these chapters shows that it still has applicability, as exemplified by UFO tourists Matt Holm and Jon Follett, who appreciated the “intriguing” information offered by Roswell’s UFO museums but disliked the “campy, spaceman kitsch” of staged dioramas (92). And, as Holm and Follett also note, for many of those actually involved in developing, operating and promoting the museums, “the hysteria and hype of UFO capitalism is not nearly as important as coming to terms with a 49-year-old event that is still affecting their lives.” What they found in Roswell was “a hodge-podge of pseudo-science and

skillful marketing covering an underbelly of actual facts and actual people caught in what, for now, is the undefinable" (99).

That "for now" is a significant qualification. In conspiracy tourism, authenticity is linked to the notion of truth. The playful, postmodern invocation of conspiracy theory tends to evoke the sense of being "poised on the edge of an infinite abyss of suspicion" (Knight, 2000: 27), with any possibility of "answers" constantly deferred. Assassination researcher Dave Perry, conversely, "dismisses those who say the slaying was planned so perfectly that no one could ever discover it. 'That's the dead end,' he said" (Real "JFK Buffs"). For conspiracy believers like Perry, what the United States government (among other powerful entities) has or has not gotten up to behind our backs is a question to be taken seriously – and a question that *does* have an answer, which, with effort and diligence, can be discovered, and responsible parties called to account. This helps explain conspiracy tourism's emphasis on information rather than spectacle; it is largely defined by MacCannell's concept of "marker involvement" – the experience of a tourist attraction through interaction with, not "the sight itself but with some representation thereof" (1999: 110). Andrew Stuttaford remarked that both of Roswell's UFO museums "bravely ignore the significant problem of having, strictly speaking, nothing to exhibit. This is a Hamlet without the Prince, Ophelia, or even Poor Yorick" (28). The problem, however, may be less significant than it seems at first glance; for what the museums *do* offer is information – photos, clippings, and the chance to converse with other researchers or even witnesses. The IUFOMRC has

a reading room crammed with materials of all sorts on both UFOs and Roswell – an invaluable resource for me in researching this project. When I asked if there was a way I could make copies of some items, the volunteer staff offered me the use of their office copier.

Why travel to a place to read about it, especially in the age of the Internet? As we have seen, many visitors to these sites also value information that is linked in some way to physical presence, such as visual-spatial orientation; this is particularly apparent in the case of Dallas; recall assassination writer Penn Jones's assertion that "you can't understand this case until you've taken the tour" (Chapman). As described in Chapter 2, visitors to Dealey Plaza are frequently observed re-enacting or visualizing aspects of the assassination, such as the man Frank Trejo observed simulating aiming a rifle from the grassy knoll or David Dillon's tourists who study the Plaza with the "zeal of private investigators." The value of this sort of knowledge is also demonstrated by Area 51 explorers, such as the poster to the "Area 51" mailing list who was able to challenge a mainstream media article's misidentification of a photo. While visitors to Roswell might see a trip to the crash site as a chance to visualize the debris field they have seen described in print sources, Roswell tourism seems centered on a different sort of presence-based knowledge – human intelligence, the chance to, as the Roswell Chamber of Commerce brochure phrases it, interact with "actual live witnesses." The emphasis on witness credibility found in UFO discourse makes human intelligence a valuable resource, and accounts of trips to Roswell are frequently full of such intelligence –

not just what Glenn Dennis or Walter Haut said, but how “normal” they appear, how honest and unassuming their manner, as in Mike Francis’s assertion that Dennis “finds the high profile publicity and demands for appearances on national television contrary to his lifestyle” (“Eyewitness”).

And for many of the visitors featured in these chapters, face-to-face interaction is mentioned as having a social value, as well as an informational value. There is likely at least a partial truth to Jodi Dean's assertion that, prior to the existence of the Internet,

...conspiracy theorists and UFO believers, branded as “the ‘unreasonable’ and ‘irrational,’ remained isolated. They had difficulty getting attention and fighting back. Now, thanks to widespread developments in communication networks, the ‘irrational’ can get their message out. They can find and connect with those myriad others also dismissed by science. They can reclaim rationality on their own terms (1998: 9).

But while the Internet has undoubtedly made networking easier for those who hold marginalized beliefs, the three sites discussed here have, for much of their histories, represented physical spaces where conspiracy believers able to travel could find each other. Phil Patton agrees that the Internet was a place where UFO buffs “could gather without fear of the common derision” (133). But Patton, it should be recalled, also described the sense of wonder he felt upon meeting flesh-and-blood people with similar interests upon Freedom Ridge, as a uniquely powerful discovery that “I was not alone” (4). The value placed on these sites as gathering places is also

evoked by Clayton Lee, the Houstonite who praised Roswell's first UFO Festival as a "chance for believers to discuss UFOs without being ridiculed" (Schneidmiller, "Aliens"), and Doug Beers of Ft. Worth, who liked to visit the Kennedy assassination site to "talk about it and exchange ideas" with "people with similar interests" (Nather).

Finally, some visitors describe a trip to one of these sites in terms that cast it as an opportunity to commune with the place itself, or the history it holds, in some hard-to-define way. "The link with a place or person whose significance everyone knows is automatically retellable," Nick Couldry argues in his study of "media pilgrims," "for once, that frame yields a story that you can report in the *first person*" (2001: 78). The language used to describe such visits is sometimes tinged with a sense of the uncanny:

Late in the night, my brother and I drive out to the airbase and find Hangar 84, where the alien bodies were supposedly kept. We stand in the beam of our headlights and stare into the darkened windows, wondering if the stories are true, almost wishing for a pale, oval face to stare back at us. For a moment, the eerie darkness fills our imaginations (Makichuk).

The cultural practice of pilgrimage is closely linked with the concept of the paranormal – in a literal interpretation of the word, traveling "beyond the normal."

The pilgrim, Luigi Tomasi writes, "feels compelled to travel to the places most imbued with mystery, those where the meaning of religion is most evident" (2002: 3). Tomasi defines pilgrimage as a "journey undertaken for religious purposes that

culminates in a visit to a place considered to be the site or manifestation of the supernatural” (ibid, 3). While Kennedy's life and death have certainly acquired supernatural cadences in American culture (museum curator Conover Hunt refers to the site of his death as "sacred ground" [6]), of the three sites examined here, the two associated with UFO phenomena bear the most noticeable relation to the supernatural, despite the invocation of science in both instances.

Jesse Marcel's story of unidentifiable wreckage and Bob Lazar's story of technologically advanced aircraft support the most common understanding of UFO phenomena, which revolves around what ufologists term the “extraterrestrial hypothesis.” This is the belief that UFOs represent interstellar craft piloted by an alien race. A tradition of speculation about life on other planets dates to the Scientific Revolution, when Copernicus dislodged the earth from the center of the universe. While the Aristotelian earth-centered model of the universe and the Judeo-Christian tradition of a singular creation had mutually supported each other, the reconceptualization of the earth as one planet amongst many led to speculation that other planets might be inhabited, posing a theological challenge that was summed up by the 17th century astronomer Johannes Kepler: “if their globes are nobler, we are not the noblest of rational creatures. Then, how can all things be for man's sake? How can we be masters of God's handiwork?” (cited in Crowe, 45). American educator and theologian Timothy Dwight, in a series of sermons given at Yale between 1795 and 1817, embraced the concept of an inhabited moon, declaring that “it is most rationally concluded, that Intelligent beings in great multitudes

inhabit her lucid regions, beings probably far better and happier than ourselves" (I, 287). These beings would be better, Dwight assumed, because they were without original sin. Thus did Dwight address the challenge to Christian orthodoxy put forth by the plurality of worlds; while life was created on all extant worlds, the Fall, and Christian redemption, were exclusive to our own: "in this world there exists a singular and astonishing system of Providence, a system of mediation between God and his revolted creatures. This system, never found elsewhere, is accomplished here" (V, 509).

Dwight's nineteenth-century vision of prelapsarian extraterrestrial worlds prefigured the morally and spiritually superior alien beings described by twentieth-century "contactees," such as George Adamski, who in the 1950s related messages from Venusians and Saturnians expressing concern over the warlike habits of Earth. Brenda Denzler, who has studied the ways in which "religion and ufology have been intertwined" (2001: 103), suggests that "most contactees were students of spiritualism and Theosophy who had adopted a mantle that was (at the very least) quasi-scientific and modern" (ibid, 104). Not nearly scientific enough, however, to satisfy most of those who sought to establish the serious study of UFO phenomena as a legitimate field; "although many in the UFO community struggled with mainstream science, they nevertheless tended (or intended) to use a scientific framework for understanding UFO phenomena. There was almost no room in the organized study of aerial anomalies for religion, which one theologically oriented ufologist candidly described as a 'wart'" (Denzler, 2001: 103). Denzler quotes one

ufologist as asserting, “The biggest problem in ufology is the unscientific, mystical, muddleheaded, New Age element that tends to make a shambles of the enterprise with completely uncritical and illogical outpourings. As long as we passively embrace them rather than openly disown them, we deserve as a field not to be taken seriously” (ibid, 141).

Despite this scientific framework, however, ufology remains a field imbued with what Denzler calls “functionally religious valences” (2001: 157). Those who have witnessed UFOs often revert to a language of the extraordinary, describing the anomalies as what ufologist Matthew Graeber calls “modern-day signs in the skies” (2002: 15) rather than as a mundane biological or technical presence. Graeber writes of one witness that “Mrs. Bailey said that her existence was not mundane, but exceptional and filled with new purpose . . . In them she found refuge, strength, and hope. Was her UFO sighting the modern-day equivalent of a genuine religious experience? Surely her philosophical and spiritual transformation seem to be, at least in part, related to the event” (ibid, 14). Denzler agrees that “Witnesses to UFO phenomena often described their experiences as extraordinary, life-changing events – and the language of awe, the language of the dumbfounded, is a religious language” (2001: 105). Encounters with extraterrestrials can be understood in this light as a sort of scientization of the miraculous – an experience of wonder expressed in the lingua franca of science. Aliens can represent saints, angels, and devils represented in terms of astronomy, biology and technology. With this insight, the flow of visitors to the “Black Mailbox,” the isolated rancher’s mailbox that marks the

spot where Bob Lazar and his friends witnessed what they described as anomalous lights in the sky, becomes understandable as a form of pilgrimage. As Ian Reader says, pilgrims “head for the places where such miracles are said to have occurred, at which they might thus occur again, and in order to encounter the saints who might be distributing such miracles” (1993: 228).



Fig. 30: Flowers and flags left by a marker in Dealey Plaza, Nov. 22, 2003 (photo by Shelley McGinnis)

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the concept of the spiritual journey, the “journey to an ‘elsewhere’ sometimes more desired than known” (Tomasi, 2002: 3), is not only found in the context of organized religion, but also in what Ian Reader calls “the going out and coming back’ initiated by an emotional response to an

assassination, miracle, apparition or tragedy that transcends the ordinary patterns for life, or through the simple wish to step outside the normal flow of life" (1999: 220). He claims that the visits of history buffs to such sites as Gettysburg or Little Big Horn, for example, or the journey of Elvis fans to his home at Graceland, can be helpful in enhancing our understanding of pilgrimage as a phenomenon, as an institution and as a recurrent theme in the emotional and religiously inclined behavior of human beings" (ibid, 221). I would argue that the sites examined in these chapters can be understood as pilgrimage sites, not only because they represent events "outside the normal flow of life," but also due to the relationship between conspiracy theory and what Robert Neely Bellah calls "American civil religion."

Conover Hunt, the creator and curator of Dallas's Sixth Floor Exhibit, reiterates the claim that "We don't have a common religion. We don't have a common heritage. We're not all of the same race. But we do have a common civil religion: American democracy" (M. Greene). In U.S. contexts, conspiracy theory is at its most basic level an expression of concern about the state of "American democracy;" a sense of alienation between the actual practices of the state and the belief system that America represents to many of its citizens, an ideal of government "by, of, and for the people," in the words of the Declaration of Independence that so many American citizens memorized in grade school. Penn Jones's claim that "Democracy died that day in Dealey Plaza" (K. Jones, "Skeptic's Lot") – the triumph, as he believes, of the secret "shadow government" over public, democratically-

elected government – expresses a deep commitment to the ideal that the government is by right accountable to the will of the people. As John Fiske says, the process by which a counterknowledge (such as a conspiracy myth) develops involves “recovering repressed information, disarticulating and rearticulating events, and producing a comprehensive and coherent account”; in other words, it involves a fair amount of work, and “hard labor always requires strong motivation” (1996: 192).

Jodi Dean believes that “Insofar as its practitioners can link together varieties of disparate phenomena to find patterns of denial, occlusion, and manipulation, conspiracy theory, far from a label dismissively attached to the lunatic fringe, may well be an appropriate vehicle for political contestation” (1998: 8). This argument is rooted in these practitioners’ commitment to participatory democracy not only in principle, but in practice. As we have seen, one discourse activated in all three of these sites places a heavy emphasis on the individual’s responsibility *and* right to get the facts and decide for him or herself. As Dean observes, this imperative has a long history in UFO discourse. The Cold War era “culture of containment is where the UFO discourse grew up . . . Because it linked outerspace with amateur achievement, flying saucer society made possible a sort of populist agency that contested the presumed authority of Cold War containment culture” (1998:34). This tradition is carried forward in International UFO Museum board member Max Littell’s assertion that the IUFOMRC would “put information out and let people make up their own minds” (John Miller, “Panel”); similarly, Tom Bowden of Dallas’s Conspiracy Museum claims that “We want people to think” (Yearwood) and Tom Mahood

claims on his Area 51 web site that his opinion “shouldn’t matter a whole lot to you. I would much prefer you to think for yourself!”

Steve Hauser, who on his web site described his investigations into Area 51 as a blend of “scholarly study and patriotic surveillance,” has also called himself a “proud participant in the subversion of the dominant paradigm” for his role in challenging what he views as an abuse of governmental power. But of course, not all conspiracy discourse can be described as subversive; one only has to look at recent ongoing claims that Obama’s birth certificate has been falsified to see that individual conspiracy theories can be profoundly reactionary. But in answering the question raised at the beginning of this project – namely, what can these sites tell us about the cultural practices activated by the intersection of conspiracy theory, popular culture and tourism – the emphasis on the right of the individual to participate in the process of knowledge formation stands out as something of a revelation. This triangular connection between conspiracy theory, American civil religion, and the current political disaffection felt by many American citizens is something that I think merits further consideration, in that it opens the study of conspiracy theory to wider and deeper concerns.

Historian Mary Fulbrook once defined social history as “history with the people put back in” (2005: 17). I think it is apparent that the conclusions I have been able to draw here are made possible by attention to individual people involved with these sites in a number of different ways, and the traces of their voices left in newspaper and magazine articles, promotional materials, Internet newsgroups, and

other such ephemeral sources. Although such traces are necessarily mediated and incomplete, recovering them opens rich possibilities for combining Haralovich's call for "periodization" (1986: 13) and "the detailed 'microhistory' necessary for understanding everyday life" (ibid, 6) with the "multidiscursive" analysis demanded by Fiske:

The contemporary United States...is a multidiscursive society...and any analysis of its culture must be as concerned with discursive relations and with discursive practices. It must uncover the processes of discursive contestation by which discourse work to repress, marginalize, and invalidate others; by which they struggle for audibility and for access to the technologies of social circulation, and by which they fight to promote and defend the interests of their respective social formations (1996: 4).

This approach, in turn, is what I think makes possible not only understanding conspiracy theory as, in Peter Knight's phrase, "part of the American vernacular" (2000: 25); it further unearths the deeper concerns – the sense of alienation from the practices of both political life and knowledge formation – that account for conspiracy theory's extraordinary and persistent popularity at this point in American cultural life.

Works Cited

A

Abbott, Arlinda. *Dealey Plaza: the Front Door of Dallas*. Dallas: The Sixth Floor Museum, 2003.

Amadon, April. "Festival Kicks Off with Lectures, Presentations." *Roswell Daily Record* 2 July 2004, 1.

Anders, John. "Movie Shoot Triggers Our '63 Memories." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Apr. 1991, C1.

_____. "Can We Finally Lay JFK to Rest?" *Dallas Morning News* 5 Dec. 1991, C1.

_____. "Coming to Grips with Slippery Facts about JFK's Death." *Dallas Morning News* 17 May 1995, C1.

Ant Farm and T.R. Uthco. *The Eternal Frame*. Perfs. Doug Hall, Doug Michels. 1975. Video cassette. Video Data Bank, 1990.

"Apologizes: Melvin Belli Alters Idea of Dallas." *Dallas Morning News* 6 June 1968, D4.

Attlesey, Sam. "Tragic Sensations Haunt Historical Site" *Dallas Morning News* 23 May 1976, A1.

Aynesworth, Hugh. "Depository Controversy Lingers." *Dallas Morning News* 16 Nov. 1971, A13.

B

Bancroft, Bill. "Past Tense Production." *U.S. News & World Report*, 27 May 1991, 110:20, 19.

Barber, Dan. "Sixth Floor Visitors Set Record." *Dallas Morning News* 19 Apr. 1992, A33.

Barra, Allen, and Ty Burr. "JFK." *Entertainment Weekly* 17 Jan. 1992, 14-16.

Bass, Shermakaye. "Window Into Our Souls." *Dallas Morning News*, 18 Feb. 1993, C1.

Bedell, Doug. "Nov. 22 Observed by Few." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1985, C1.

Belden, Tom. "Spectators Flashback." *Dallas Morning News* 04 July 1977, A1.

_____. "Doubters of 'Lone-Gun Theory' to Note JFK Death." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1977, D1.

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus*. Winter 1967, pp. 1-21.

Belli, Anne. "JFK Gets Lukewarm Reception." *Dallas Morning News* 27 Nov. 1991, A21.

Bennett, Gillian. "Legend: Performance and Truth." *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*. Eds. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996. 17-39.

Berliner, Don, and Stanton T. Friedman. *Crash at Corona*. New York: Marlowe, 1997.

Berlitz, Charles, and William L. Moore. *The Roswell Incident*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980.

The Billy Goodman Happening. KVEG-AM, Las Vegas, 21 Nov. 1989.

Blow, Steve. "JFK Theory Sinks in the Murk Off Deep End." *Dallas Morning News*, 8 Aug. 1990, A19.

_____. "JFK Bus Tour is Eerie Ride Back to 1963." *Dallas Morning News* 8 Dec. 1991, A39.

_____. "Historical Re-enactment is no Joyride." *Dallas Morning News* 9 Aug. 1996, A37.

"Bob Lazar." *Inside Report*. Syndicated; first aired 1 June 1990.

Boesch, Barry. "150 Gather at JFK Memorial." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1977, A2.

Britton, S. "Tourism, Capital, and Place" *Toward a Critical Geography of Tourism.* *Environment and Planning C: Society and Space* 9 (1991):451-78.

Brown, Dona. *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century*. Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1995.

Brown, Julie Marie. "Montgomery Films UFO Festival for MTV." *Roswell Daily Record*, 07 03 1996, 1A.

_____. "Museum: UFO Debris is Jeweler's Work." *Roswell Daily Record* 20 Sep. 1996, 1.

Brown, Steve. "Streets to Be Closed During 'Assassination' Filming." *Dallas Morning News* 2 July 1977, D1.

Browne, Malcolm W. "Rumors of U.S. Superplane Appear Unfounded." *New York Times*. 19 Jan. 1993, 3C.

Brumley, Al. "Lights, Camera, Delays." *Dallas Morning News*. 15 Apr. 1991 A1.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2002.

Burbank, Jeff. "UFO Congress Out of this World." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 15 Dec. 1991, 1B.

Byers, Joshua. "Jennings Embraces UFO Fame." *Vision* 1 July 1997, 38.

C

Callaway, Helen. "Plaza Area Provides Stroll Through History." *Dallas Morning News* 18 Nov. 1967, A6.

Campbell, Glenn. *Area 51 Viewer's Guide*. Self-published. 1995.

_____. "Meet the Interceptors." *I Was Abducted By Aliens at Area 51*. <<http://www.aliensonearth.com/dreamland/interceptors/>> 27 Dec. 2008.

_____. "Re: The Real Reason for Counter Event." Posted to alt.conspiracies.area51. From: campbell@ufomind.com, 2 Apr, 1996.

_____. "Spy 1 and Spy 2." *I Was Abducted By Aliens at Area 51*. <<http://www.aliensonearth.com/dreamland/spy/>> 27 Dec. 2008.

Castro, Tony. "For Sale: A Historic Landmark." *Dallas Morning News* 15 Mar. 1973, D1.

Chambers, Erve. *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism*. Prospect Heights: Waveland, 2000.

Chapman, Robert. "JFK Lancer Announces New Editor for KAC." *Kennedy Assassination Chronicles*. Winter 1998: 2.

Clark, Jerome. *Unexplained!* Farmington Hills: Visible Ink, 1999.

Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.

Cling, Carol. "Moviegoers Will See Nevada's Independence Day Role." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 July 1996, 11E.

"Coca-Cola Presents Roswell, the Musical." *The Roswell Monitor* II:2, 9.

Cochnar, Bob. "Advertise and They Will Come." *New Mexico Business Journal*, May 1991, 13-15.

Cockerell, Penny. "Thousands in Dallas Recall JFK's Death." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. 23 Nov. 2003, A4.

"Convention, Concert Supported." *Roswell Daily Record*, 7 Feb. 1997, 4.

Copilevitz, Todd. "Profusion of Plots." *Dallas Morning News* 15 Nov. 1991 A23.

Couldry, Nick. *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Crosby, Deon. "An Encounter Can Happen in Roswell!" *Vision* 3 July 1996, 32.

Crowe, Michael. *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate, 1750-1900*. Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 1986.

Cubitt, G.T. "Conspiracy Myths and Conspiracy Theories." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*. 20:1(1989) 12-26.

D

DaHarb, Marifrank. "Mainstreet Roswell Planning UFO Celebration in '95." *Roswell Daily Record*, 3 Aug. 1994, p. 1.

Daly, Steve. "Camera Obscura." *Entertainment Weekly* 17 Jan. 1992, 16-17.

Daniel, Mike. "The Odds and Ends of History." *Dallas Morning News* 2 Feb. 1996.

Dash, Mike. *Borderlands*. London: Arrow, 1997.

Dean, Jodi. *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998.

_____. "Webs of Conspiracy." In *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*. Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss, eds. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Dennis, Glenn. *1947 Roswell Incident*. Roswell: Alpha-Omega Printing, 1991.

Denzler, Brenda. *The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

Dill, Gailanne. "Alien Encounter: Experience the Fear Test." *Vision Magazine*, July 2004, p. 20-21.

_____. "Eyewitness to UFO History: Walter Haut." *Vision* 1 July 1997, 7.

_____. "The Truth – Is It Out There or Is It in Roswell?" *Gateway* 2:1 (May-June 1997), 22.

Dillon, David. "Dealey Plaza: Familiar Yet Mysterious." *Dallas Morning News* 21 Nov. 1993, C3.

Doussard, Robin. "A View From The Sixth Floor Exhibit." *Dallas Morning News* 8 Apr. 1990, G8.

Dudding, Erika. "Backers hope 'UFO month' to Put Roswell on the Map." *Roswell Daily Record*, 3 July 1994, p. 1.

_____. "Researcher's Book May Explain UFOs." *Roswell Daily Record*, 3 July 1994, p. 23.

Duncan, Argen. "UFO Conference This Weekend." *Roswell Daily Record*, 30 June 2004, A2.

Dunkelberg, Lee. "Actors Re-create Assassination Scene." *Dallas Morning News* 12 Aug. 1975, D4.

Dwight, Timothy. *Theology Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons*. New York : G. & C. Carvill, 1830.

E

Eade, J., and M.J. Sallnow, "Introduction." *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. Eade and Sallnow, eds. London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 1-29.

Emmerich, Roland, director. *Independence Day*. Perfs. Will Smith, Bill Pullman. 1996. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003.

"The Extraterrestrial Highway." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 4 Feb 1996, 6B.

F

Fainstein, Susan, and Dennis R. Judd. "Global Forces, Local Strategies, and Urban Tourism." *The Tourist City*. Fainstein and Judd, eds. 1999: New Haven, Yale UP. 1-17.

Feagin, J.R. *The New Urban Paradigm*. Boulder: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998.

Featsent, Ann. "Close Encounters of the Money-Making Kind." *Restaurants USA* October 1997, 28-31.

"Festival Set in City Park." *Roswell Daily Record*, 5 July 1987, 10.

Fiske, John. *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*. Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 1996.

_____. *Reading the Popular*. Winchester: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

_____. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Winchester: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Fitzgerald, Ken. *Dallas Then and Now*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2001.

Fleming, Elvis E. *Roswell, New Mexico: A Brief History*. Roswell: Historic Society for Southeast New Mexico, 2003.

Fleming, Nancy. "National Media Investigate Success." *Roswell Daily Record* 7 July 1993, 1.

_____. "UFO Museum Tops 10,000, Names Alien." *Roswell Daily Record* 2 July 1993, 10.

Flick, David. "1963 Revisited." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1993, A1.

_____. "A City in the Spotlight." *Dallas Morning News* 21 Nov. 2003, B1.

_____. "Grief, Suspicion Linger on Anniversary." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 2003, A1.

Francis, Michael. "Eyewitness to UFO History: Glenn Dennis." *Vision*. 1 July 1997.

_____. "Incidentally..." *Vision*. 3 July 1996, 2.

Freedenthal, Stacey. "Conspiracy Weary." *Dallas Morning News*. 5 May 1993 A33.

_____. "29 Years After the Assassination." *Dallas Morning News*. 23 Nov. 1992, A17.

Friedman, Stanton T., producer and host. *Flying Saucers Are Real*. DVD. UFO Video, Inc, 2005.

Fulbrook, Mary. "Introduction: The People's Paradox." *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005.

G

Geddie, John. "Nov. 22 Trauma Becomes History." *Dallas Morning News*. 22 Nov. 1969, A1.

Gentsch, Frank M., Jr., "Time to Stop Rehashing." *Dallas Morning News*. 23 Nov. 2003, H3.

Goffman, Erving. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: U of Edinburgh P, 1956.

Goldberg, Robert Alan. *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America*. New Haven, Yale UP, 2001.

Goldman, Peter. "Dallas: New Questions and Answers." *Newsweek* 28 Apr. 1975, 36-38.

Golz, Earl. "Kennedy Film Won't Be Cut." *Dallas Morning News* 6 Mar. 1975, D1.

_____. "Shooting Gory Sight." *Dallas Morning News* 7 Mar. 1975, A1.

Good, Joshua. "No Peeking From Peak." *Salt Lake Tribune* 17 Oct. 1993, 3A.

Goodnight, Dennis. "Authors Ask Roswellites to Help Solve UFO Puzzle." *Roswell Daily Record* 11 July 1991, 1.

- Gottdiener, Mark. *The New Urban Sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.
- Graeber, Matthew. "Signs in the Skies." *Fate*. Jan./Feb. 2002, 15-17.
- Graham, Patrick. "Route 375." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 21 May 1995, 8B.
- Greene, Mariana. "Hyping History." *Dallas Morning News* 9 Oct. 1996, C5.
- Greene, Susan. "Groom Lake Spotlight Grows Brighter." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 2 Oct. 1994, 1B.
- Griffith, Dotty. "Kennedy Service." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1973, A1
- Gross, Andy. "Crosbys Bask in UFO Expo Afterglow." *Roswell Daily Record*, 1 July 1996, 1.
- _____. "Have UFOs, Will Attract Crowds." *Roswell Daily Record*, 5 July 1996, 1A.
- H-L**
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Thomas Burger, trans. (1991). Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.
- Hamilton, John. "Site Sought for UFO Museum." *Roswell Daily Record* 7 July 1992, 1.
- _____. "Civic Center Now Needs Parking." *Roswell Daily Record*, 12 July 1992, 1.
- Hanes, Tracy. "An Idea That's Out of this World." *Toronto Star*, 3 July 2008, T6.
- Haralovich, Mary Beth. "The Social History of Film: Heterogeneity and Mediation" *Wide Angle* 8(2) (1986) 2-14.
- Hauser, Steve. *Desert Secrets*. www.desertsecrets.com, 14 Apr. 2000.
- Heald, Bill. "A Question of Debris." *Rider* 24:2 pp 38-42.
- Holm, Matthew, and Jonathan Follett. *Gray Highway: An American UFO Journey*. New York: Toadspittle Hill Productions, 1998.
- Housewright, Ed. "Building's Use in JFK Film Backed." *Dallas Morning News* 6 Mar. 1991, A23.

Howell, Larry. "Others Now Know How Dallas Felt." *Dallas Morning News* 3 Dec. 1969, D4.

Huff, Gene. "Synopsis." 15 Apr. 2000. www.serve.com/mahood/lazar/synopsis>

Hunt, Conover. *Dealey Plaza National Historic Landmark*. Dallas: The Sixth Floor Museum, 1997.

JFK: Breaking the News. Produced by KERA-Dallas/Fort Worth and The Sixth Floor Museum. DVD. 2003.

Jackson, David. "Enduring Intrigue." *Dallas Morning News* 21 Nov. 1993, A1.

Jameson, Fredric. "Cognitive Mapping." *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.

_____. *The Cultural Turn: Selective Writings on the Postmodern*. New York: Verso, 1998.

_____. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.

_____. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Jerome, Richard. "A Saucer Scorned." *People*, 31 Oct. 1994, 93-96.

Jones, Kathryn. "Price Tag on JFK Intrigue." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1991, D1.

_____. "The Skeptic's Lot." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1992, "Dallas Life," 7.

Jones, Linda. "Street Vendors Aren't Begging for Business." *Dallas Morning News* 15 Oct. 1996, C1.

Judd, Dennis. "Constructing the Tourist Bubble." *The Tourist City*. Fainstein and Judd, eds. 1999: New Haven, Yale UP.

Kennelly, Louise. "City's Survival Story Draws Media." *Roswell Daily Record* 4 July 1993, 1.

"Keeping the Roswell Secret." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 25 June 2003.

Knight, Peter. *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Lane, Earl. "Secret Planes Pulsing Above Desert?" *Seattle Times*. 22 Sep. 1992.
<<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/date=19920922&slug=1514421>>.

Laughead, Kelly. "Alien Resistance HQ Opens its Doors." *Roswell Daily Record* 23 July 2000, A1.

_____. "Merchants Fear Move." *Roswell Daily Record* 16 July 2000, A1.

Lee, Steven H. "Texas Tourism's Up, Doc." *Dallas Morning News*, 8 Sep. 1992, D1.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Social Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Leninger, Merrie. "Families Find Fun and Games at DeBremmond." *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 July 1997, A11.

Levy, Pierre. *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: Perseus, 1997.

Lincoln, Peter. "Coming: A JFK Assassination Museum." *Politics Today* March/April 1980, 8.

Lippard, Lucy R. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. New York: New Press, 1988.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990.

Lowell, Joe. "UFO Series Brings Out Believers." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 26 Oct. 1993, 9A.

Lunsford, J. Lynn. "Judge OKs Downey Broadcast." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1992, A17.

M

MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.

McKinnon, Shaun. "Hollywood Invades the E.T. Highway." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 19 Apr. 1996, 1B.

Mahood, Tom. "Big Buildings and Things that Aren't There." Posted to "Area 51 Mailing List" 2 Feb. 1997.

_____. "The Bob Lazar Corner." 25 Apr. 2000.
<www.serve.com/mahood/lazar/lazarmn.htm>

_____. "Finis." 15 Apr. 2000. <www.serve.com/mahood/finis.htm>

Makichuk, Jim. "A Skeptic at the Holy Grail." *AAA New Mexico*, 1:3, 21.

Manchester, William. *The Death of a President*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Markley, Robert. "Alien Assassinations: The X-Files and the Paranoid Structure of History" *Camera Obscura* 40-41 (1999): 76-103.

Marvel, Bill. "Oliver's Twist." *Dallas Morning News* 27 Dec. 1991, F1.

Marvel, Bill, and Delia M. Rios. "Flashback: Will Oliver Stone's Film Help Dallas Confront the Darkest Moment in its Past?" *Dallas Morning News* 21 Apr. 1991, F1.

Mason, Don. "Curious Come Back." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1973, A6.

Mathews, Tracy. "Crowds Flock to UFO Museum Opening." *Roswell Daily Record* 9 Feb. 1997, 1.

Maurstad, Tom. "In the Electronic World, We're All Part of the Media." *Dallas Morning News* 17 July 1994, C1.

_____. "Obsession: To the Self-proclaimed Experts Who Still Fervently Dissect JFK's Assassination, the Mystery Transcends the Truth." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1991, C1.

Miller, Jay. "Roswell Billboards Nationwide." *Roswell Daily Record*, 1 Feb. 1998, A4.

_____. "Roswell Makes the Big Time." *Roswell Daily Record* 10 July 1997, A4.

_____. "Roswell More Than UFO City." *Roswell Daily Record* 4 July 1997, A4.

_____. "UFO Encounter Is a Success." *Roswell Daily Record*, 6 July 1995, 4.

Miller, John. "Panel Asks For Study on UFO Plan." *Roswell Daily Record* 7 Aug. 1992, 1.

_____. "Showers Don't Dampen Events." *Roswell Daily Record* 12 July 1992, 1.

Miller, Robert. "Sixth Floor Museum to Widen Historical Role." *Dallas Morning News* 1 June 1997, H4.

Minutaglio, Bill. "Quiet Healers." *Dallas Morning News* 21 Nov. 1993, Dallas Life, 8.

Murchison, William. "Why Continue to Stone Dallas Over JFK?" *Dallas Morning News*, 20 Apr. 1991, A31.

N-O

Nather, David. "Theoretically Speaking: Visitors to JFK Shooting Site Debate Killer." *Dallas Morning News*, 23 Nov. 1990, A31.

Nelson, Sylvie D. "Escamilla Dreaming of UFO Theme Park." *Roswell Daily Record* 13 July 1994, 1.

_____. "Midway Becoming Known for UFOs." *Roswell Daily Record*, 24 June 1994, p. 1.

_____. "Roswell Move to Be Seen in July." *Roswell Daily Record*, 26 June 1994, 3.

"Nightmare Revisited: Reenactment for Warren Commission." *Newsweek*, v. 63, 8 June 1964: 48.

"No Labeling." *Dallas Morning News* 8 June 1968, D2.

Okunbolade, Funmi. "Remembering Jack." *Where: Dallas* Nov 2003, p. 64.

Overton, James. "Depository for Sale." *Dallas Morning News* 11 Apr. 1970, A1.

P

Parker, Ray. "Rachel Party Out of this World." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 27 Aug. 1996, 1B.

_____. "Sci-Fi Movie Set in Nevada Rekindles UFO Interest." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 4 July 1996.

_____. "UFO, Rave Buffs Party in Rachel." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 24 Aug. 1996, 1A.

Pass, Fred. "Fifth Anniversary." *Dallas Morning News* 17 Nov. 1968, A40.

Patterson, Daniel W. *Bobby McMillon and a Tree Accurst: Stories of Frankie Silver*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000.

Patton, Phil. *Dreamland*. New York: Villard, 1998.

Payette, Virginia. "Time Doesn't Soften Cities' Reputations." *Dallas Morning News* 24 Nov. 1971, A17.

Pederson, Rena. "30 Years After Assassination." *Dallas Morning News* 21 Nov. 1993, J2.

Peeler, Tom. "Up on the Knoll, Y'all." *D Magazine*, Nov. 1990, 21.

Pennebaker, James W. *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others*. New York: William Marrow, 1990.

Peppard, Alan. "Depository Dating." *Dallas Morning News* 20 Jan. 1993, A27.

_____. "Stay Alert: Costner is on Location." *Dallas Morning News* 27 Apr. 1991, C1.

_____. "How Oliver Stone Got the 'Provocateur' Label." *Dallas Morning News* 31 Dec. 1991, C4.

Pettit, Mike. "Building's Fate Rests With Council." *Roswell Daily Record* 9 Dec. 1992, 1.

Pflock, Karl T. *Roswell: Inconvenient Facts and the Will to Believe*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2001.

Polly, Karen. "International UFO Museum Has New Director." *Vision* 3 July 1996, 35.

Powell, Larry. "Someone Really Ought to Make a Movie About This Town." *Dallas Morning News* 27 June 1991, A34.

_____. "Timing is Everything." *Dallas Morning News* 8 Jan. 1992, A20.

_____. "Once Again, the Calendar Reopens Dallas' Psychic Wounds." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1995, A24.

_____. "Look Up in the Sky and Honk if You Love Nature." *Dallas Morning News* 17 Nov. 1994, A34.

Price, John. *Roswell: A Quest for the Truth*. San Diego: Truth Seeker Co.; 1997.

_____. "The Roswell Saucer." *The Roswell Monitor* II:2, 15-17.

Przybys, John. "Entertainment a Part of the Lineup at 51s Games." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 1 May 2001, 1E.

Punter, Dale. "Gate to Area 51 photo (Popular Mechanics)" Posted to "Area 51 Mailing List." 18 May 1997.

Puppel, Doug. "Extraterrestrial Highway Ceremony Set." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 14 Apr. 1996, 3B.

R

Randle, Kevin D. and Donald R. Schmitt. *The Truth about the UFO Crash at Roswell*. New York: M. Evans, 1994.

_____. *UFO Crash at Roswell*. New York: Avon, 1991.

Rangel, Enrique. "City Makes Offer for Texas Theater: Nonprofit JFK Center Also Trying to Buy Site Where Oswald Was Arrested." *Dallas Morning News* 17 Mar. 1993, A29.

_____. "Sad Picture." *Dallas Morning News* 10 Jan. 1993, A1.

_____. "Messages of Sorrow." *Dallas Morning News* 11 Nov. 1992, A29.

Reader, Ian. "Conclusions." *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture*. Ian Reader and Tony Walter, eds. London: MacMillan, 1993, pp. 220-246.

Real, David. "Hundreds Mark Anniversary of JFK Assassination." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1991, A39.

_____. "6th Floor a Place to Grieve for JFK, Ex-Curator Says." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1991 A29.

_____. "JFK Buffs Tirelessly Pursue Truth." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1990, A45.

Rich, Ben. *The Skunk Works*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1994.

Ridgely, Lisa. "Roswell 2004: Long Hours, Hard Work Come to Fruition in Alien City Today." *Roswell Daily Record* 1 July 2004, 1.

Ritzer, George, and Allen Liska. "'McDisneyization' and 'Post-Tourism: Complementary Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism.'" *Touring Cultures: Transformation of Travel and Theory*. Chris Rojek and John Urry, eds. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Rogers, Keith. "Atomic Testing Museum." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 4 Oct. 2003, 2B.

_____. "'Spy' Turns Focus on Buffer Area." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 5 Dec. 1993, 1A, 5A.

Roswell Convention and Visitor's Bureau. "Roswell UFO Encounters '98 and Beyond." *The Roswell Monitor*, I:2, 18-19.

S

Schneidmiller, Chris. "'Aliens,' Tourists Touch Down Here." *Roswell Daily Record*, 2 July 1995, p.1.

_____. "UFO Encounter Experience to Help in Planning: Crosby." *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 July 1995.

Schwartz, Marilyn. "Everyone's an Expert about JFK." *Dallas Morning News* 24 Dec. 1991, C1.

Scott, Steve. "JFK Action Draws Crowd to Oak Cliff." *Dallas Morning News* 2 May 1991, A32.

_____. "Filming at Dealey Wraps Up." *Dallas Morning News* 28 Apr. 1991, A33.

Seal, Mark. "Can Hollywood Solve JFK's Murder?" *Texas Monthly* 19:12. 128+.

Sellars, Richard, and Tony Walter. "From Custer to Kent State: Heroes, Martyrs and the Evolution of Popular Shrines in the USA." *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture*. Ian Reader and Tony Walter, eds. London: MacMillan, 1993, pp. 179-200.

"Sen. Tower Blasts 'Sickness' Theory." *Dallas Morning News* 12 June 1968, A6

Simon, Art. *Dangerous Knowledge: The Kennedy Assassination in Art and Film*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996.

"Sixth Floor: County Needs to Protect JFK Exhibit." *Dallas Morning News* 28 Nov. 1992, A30.

Slover, Pete. "County Oks Contract for JFK Film Work." *Dallas Morning News* 15 Mar. 1991, A32.

Smith, Russell, and Jane Sumner. "JFK has 1st Dallas Screening." *Dallas Morning News* 20 Dec. 1991, A33.

Sobchack, Vivian, Ed. *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Sorkin, Michael. "See You in Disneyland." *Variations on a Theme Park*. Michael Sorkin, ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

Stolley, Richard B. "What Happened Next..." *Esquire* November 1973, 134-35, 262.

Stolley, Richard B. "Zapruder Rewound." *Life* 21:10 (September 1998), pp. 43-48.

Stone, Oliver, director. *JFK*. Perfs. Kevin Costner, Tommy Lee Jones. 1991. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2000.

Stone, Tom. "JFK Class Remains Relevant." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 2003, H5.

"Stone's Opening." Editorial. *The Nation*. 254:6, 184.

Strauss, Annette, and Carolyn Brown. *Dallas: World Class Texas*. Memphis: Tower Publishing, 1997.

Stuttaford, Andrew. "Close Encounter." *National Review*, 10 July 1995, 26-28.

Sumner, Jane. "Center Director Has Been Swept Into Media Blitz." *Dallas Morning News* 23 Nov. 1991, C1.

_____. "Another Motorcade, Another Film Crew." *Dallas Morning News* 26 July 1991, C4.

_____. "Strip Joint Owner Fascinates Those Who Tell His Story in 'Ruby.'" *Dallas Morning News* 11 Aug. 1991, C1.

_____. "Talking Reel Money." *Dallas Morning News* 4 Aug. 1991 C1.

_____. "Casting for Stone." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Feb. 1991, C3.

_____. "Stone to Shoot Movie on JFK in Dallas." *Dallas Morning News* 25 Jan. 1991, C3.

T

Tatum, Henry. "One More Time for 'That Day.'" *Dallas Morning News* 17 Apr. 1991, A22.

_____. "Another Stone Tossed at Dallas." *Dallas Morning News* 12 Jan. 1992, A28.

Trejo, Frank. "Drawn to a Tragedy." *Dallas Morning News* 30 May 1998, A25.

Tolbert, Frank X. "Arch's 'Hate Dallas' Crusade." *Dallas Morning News* 16 Nov. 1967, D1.

Tomasi, Luigi. "Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey." *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Modern Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*. William Swatos and Luigi Tomasi, eds. Westport: Praeger, 2002, pp. 1-24.

Tucker, Chris. "A Truce With History." *Dallas Morning News* 22 Nov. 1993, 13A.

"Turning Point." *Roswell Daily Record*. 9 July 2000, A3.

U-Z

"'UFO Day' Proclaimed." *Roswell Daily Record* 9 July 1991, 1.

"UFO Incident Alive After 45 Years." Associated Press. *Roswell Daily Record* 6 July 1992, 1.

"UFO Museum Grand Opening to be Held 3-7 p.m. Saturday." *Roswell Daily Record* 6 Feb. 1997, 5.

Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage, 1990.

Villone, Allison. "The Sci-Fi Channel Invades Roswell, and Roswell Storms the Sci-Fi Channel." *Sci-Fi Entertainment*, July 1997, 12.

Vogel, Ed. "No Hope for Alien Highway." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 24 June 1995, 2B.

_____. "Rural Road May Help E.T. Find Home." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 2 Feb. 1996, 1A.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

Watson, Karen. "New Mexico Tourism: Phenomenal." *Newsline: New Mexico Tourism*. Summer 1997, 7-12.

Weiss, Jeffrey. "Covering All Angles: JFK Movie May Use at Least Five Sniper Sites." *Dallas Morning News* 17 Apr. 1991, A25.

_____. "It's 1963 Again – Almost." *Dallas Morning News*, 16 Apr. 1991, A1.

West, Dick. "'City of Hate,' in Retrospect." *Dallas Morning News*, 19 Nov. 1967, C2.

"West End Mall Managers Shut JFK Memorabilia Shop." *Dallas Morning News* 2 Jan. 1990, A14.

Willman, Skip. "Spinning Paranoia." *Conspiracy Nation*. Peter Knight, ed. New York: New York UP, 2002.

Wilson, Adriane. "Film Piques Interest in Kennedy Exhibit." *Dallas Morning News* 27 Jan. 1992, A18.

Wise, David, and Ross, Thomas. *The Invisible Government*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

Wood, Thomas J. "On-line with the Director." *Newsline – New Mexico Tourism*. 1:2 (Winter 1993), 2.

Wright, Jim. "What Tourists Like Best." *Dallas Morning News* 7 May 1991, A15.

Wright, Lawrence. "Was Dallas a City of Hate?" *D Magazine*, Nov. 1988, pp 62-67 +.

Wrolstad, Mark. "Dummies, Lasers Test JFK Theories." *Dallas Morning News* 4 Sep. 1998, A33.

Yearwood, John. "To Tell the Truth." *Dallas Morning News* 24 Jan. 1995, A13.

Zalev, Suzanne. "UFO Costume Contest Draws Aliens to Roswell." *Roswell Daily Record*, 7 July 1996, 14.

Zimmerman, Lauren. *Survey on JFK Assassination Beliefs*. Unpublished research, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2004.

Zoglin, Richard. "More Shots in Dealey Plaza." *Time* 19 June 1991, 137:22, 64.

Zucco, Tom. "If It Gets Built, Will They Come?" *St Petersburg Times*. 31 May 2007, D1.