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Winner of the PEN Center USA Literary Award for Research Nonfiction Named one of the Top 3 JFK Books by Parade Magazine.

Named 1 of The 5 Essential Kennedy assassination books ever written by The Daily Beast.

Named one of the Top Nonfiction Books of 2013 by Kirkus Reviews.

In the months and weeks before the fateful November 22nd, 1963, Dallas was brewing with political passions, a city crammed with larger-than-life characters dead-set against the Kennedy presidency. These included rabid warriors like defrocked military general Edwin A. Walker; the world's richest oil baron, H. L. Hunt; the leader of the largest Baptist congregation in the world, W.A. Criswell; and the media mogul Ted Dealey, who raucously confronted JFK and whose family name adorns the plaza where the president was murdered. On the same stage was a compelling cast of marauding gangsters, swashbuckling politicians, unsung civil rights heroes, and a stylish millionaire anxious to save his doomed city.

Bill Minutaglio and Steven L. Davis ingeniously explore the swirling forces that led many people to warn President Kennedy to avoid Dallas on his fateful trip to Texas. Breathtakingly paced, DALLAS 1963 presents a clear, cinematic, and revelatory look at the shocking tragedy that transformed America. Countless authors have attempted to explain the assassination, but no one has ever bothered to explain Dallas-until now.

With spellbinding storytelling, Minutaglio and Davis lead us through intimate glimpses of the Kennedy family and the machinations of the Kennedy White House, to the obsessed men in Dallas who concocted the climate of hatred that led many to blame the city for the president's death. Here at long last is an accurate understanding of what happened in the weeks and months leading to John F. Kennedy's assassination. DALLAS 1963 is not only a fresh look at a momentous national tragedy but a sobering reminder of how radical, polarizing ideologies can poison a city-and a nation.

Dallas 1963 Details

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Benji says

Author does a surprisingly good job of avoiding the easy comparison between now and 1963, instead allowing my own brain to make the connections. For each Walker I thought of a Ted Nugent, for each Alger I thought of Palin. Especially large in my mind was the Dealeys and their newspaper, and how that feedback loop/ echo chamber so much resembled the conservatives listening only to Fox News, Drudge Report, Pat Robinson, then being surprised that their polls were way off in the 2012 election (it's a bit like the famous line from the NY socialite who said "Nixon won? But nobody I know voted for him").

Good book, having read the Mao bio I can totally understand how the fearsome situation fighting against communism would lead to total distrust that the elected leaders were doing all they could to protect their people. That came across as the author sympathetic to those fears while being forlorn at the results of those fears. What I was surprised was that Kennedy's generals were pushing for a preemptive attack. That we never had such a thing is a miracle and a golden nugget in his legacy, I feel.

Scott says

I've read so much about the actual JFK assassination and aftermath that I feel like I have a pretty good feel for I think happened and why. But I never really read too much about the lead-up to the event and the poisonous atmosphere that was pervasive in Dallas in the early 1960's. That's exactly what this book tries to address.

After JFK's election in 1960, many of the Dallas power brokers were beside themselves. Right-wing conspiracy theories were being driven by a surprising collection of very powerful men in Dallas. The hatred was at an incredible level, with the focus being JFK and his administration, forced integration, and the communist witch hunt.

Some of the citizens spearheading these efforts were among the most recognized names in Dallas. The book directs its attention to oil billionaire H.L. Hunt, Reverend D.A. Criswell of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, disgraced U.S. General Edwin Walker, Congressman Bruce Alder, and Dallas Morning News publisher Ted Dealy. These men and others in the city were the leaders of the anti-Kennedy, 'super patriot' agenda, and were so vocal that many of Kennedy's aides strongly advised him not to travel to Dallas, fearing for his safety. But of course in the ultimate irony, Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald, a lone left-wing nut job, not affiliated with these people.

Being from Dallas, this was a fascinating book to me. But more than the local history, it is the parallels between those times and today's political atmosphere and paranoia (tea party/right-wing vs. Obama) that are striking indeed. This book is a scary, cautionary tale of our times in America that were mirrored by our not-too-distant past.

Robert Boyd says

Really good except for one weird thing--it was written in the present tense. It made for some odd reading.

Aside from this, you can see the ancestors of the Tea Party in full paranoid bloom in this book. There were the various John Birchers (and those who thought the John Birchers were too soft), as well as the "establishment" ultra-right which controlled the newspapers and much of the power structure in Dallas. They were fighting against imaginary Communist infiltrators (you know, like Eisenhower) as well as desperate rear-guard action to preserve segregation, the poll tax and other Jim Crow laws and customs. Texas is still run by the intellectual descendents of those psychos, but curiously enough, Dallas isn't. Times change.

Jim says

I grew up in Dallas. I was there in 1963 when John F. Kennedy was murdered on its streets. I've read extensively about the assassination, followed all the events from that day in November forward to the wildly varying conclusions that have arisen. But this book isn't about that period. It's about the three years prior to the assassination and about the social and political life of the city in which the assassination occurred. It is one of the most eye-opening things I have ever read, and it utterly astonished me with facts and insights about the town I thought I knew. Of course, I was a child when these events were occurring, so it's not completely surprising that I didn't grasp all the nuances. But the not-so-underground life of Dallas as the very heart of right-wing extremism in the 1960s almost completely escaped me until reading this book. The authors bend so far over backwards trying to be objective they almost come full circle. Yet for all that massive effort to impartiality, one is reminded of the old saying that facts have a liberal bent. Only the furthest right of the furthest right can look at the political climate in Dallas in the early 1960s and believe anything but that the city was a bubbling cauldron of hate and fear. In what other city in American history have high government officials been spat on and battered on television as ambassador Stevenson was during an official visit? In what other place in this country could the sitting Vice President of the United States and his wife be physically abused, intimidated, and spat on by a riotous mob of wealthy mink-clad women? That the passions of so many extreme conservatives in one place were tacitly encouraging violence to the American president is, in the end, an extraordinary irony in view of the apparent fact that it was a left-winger who gunned him down. What DALLAS 1963 does is make it crystal clear that the climate of hatred in the city was so intrinsic and deeply rooted that it actually made the assassination almost inevitable, regardless of the political position of the actual shooter. And ultimately, what is most astonishing is that the city fathers who hated Kennedy, the comparatively few high-level figures in the city who loved him, the president's staff and administrative colleagues, and even the president himself saw clearly that Dallas posed an extraordinary threat not only to his political existence and policies, but to his life itself, yet none of them heeded the alarm bells that were clanging from every direction. If there's a problem with this book, it's in a choice to tell it mostly from a present-tense framework, with inconsistent alternations with past tense. But that's a mild caveat. This is a page-turning, pulse-pounding political thriller with its conclusion already known, but with the roots that led to that conclusion now revealed in ugly glory in an innovative and riveting approach. What is perhaps most powerful in this book is the undeniable implications that the massive polarization and bitterness Americans felt toward others of different opinion in the 1960s is not dead. To paraphrase Bertolt Brecht, the bitch isn't dead. In fact, she's in heat again.

Phil says

You cannot read this book without seeing the parallels to today. Super-patriotism = tea party extremists;

a president taking us down the road to communism = a president taking us down the road to socialism. p 65

"Republicans are attacking women, and the children will probably be next." p 10. "the Lone Star state is often like a rogue nation playing by its own rules, about to secede and become its own country".

p 162 'assaults on Medicare, claiming it would create government death panels. 'a sweeping dictatorial power over medicine - a package that would literally make the President a medical czar with potential life and death power over every man, woman, and child in the country.'

p221: "Kennedy by executive orders which bypass congress has already created a body of 'laws' to transform our republic into a dictatorship".

And all this while waving the confederate flag.

Kusaimamekirai says

"The past is never dead. It's not even past"

-William Faulkner

There is no shortage of books about the assassination of John F. Kennedy on that fateful day in Dallas, November 1963. What this book does however, rather than focus on the assassination, examines the three year period in Dallas that preceded it.

What we discover is a shocking litany of vitriolic newspaper editors, oilmen, far right congressmen, a disgraced general, and others who all contributed in some form or another to the toxic environment in the city that would come to be known as the "city of hate".

Sadly, there are disturbing parallels to the world we live in now. Substitute attacks against the UN for NATO, Medicare as death panels and a socialist plot for the ACA being death panels and a...socialist plot, Nazi demonstrations in the streets with...Nazi demonstrations in the streets, and "the invisible government" for "the deep state".

I spent large portions of this book unsure if I was reading about 1963 or 2018.

Dallas in 1963 was awash in an atmosphere of hate, fanned by irresponsible rhetoric by men in positions of power. When the hate boiled over, as it inevitably must, the consequences were tragic.

One can only hope that in the present day, we are able to walk back some of our own violent and hateful rhetoric before we are doomed to repeat a similar fate.

Harold Griffin says

This is a book not of 1963 but of the current day: a time in which a well-spun story is more important than a fair or accurate one.

Dallas 1963 is marginally interesting insofar as it provides new details into the backgrounds of some of the colorful personalities that were prominent in Dallas at the time of the Kennedy assassination. But is it good or accurate history?

The book is written in the present tense, presumably to give it a sense of immediacy. That may have worked for John Updike in the fictional Rabbit Run, but is a very cheesy way of telling history. But I forget myself. This is not a book about history, it is about cheap exaggerations and stereotypes.

Two historical "incidents" are central to the premise that Dallas was a boiling cesspool of hatred in 1963. One is a demonstration, arranged by a local Congressman, in which a "mob" of rich conservative women accosted Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird en route to lunch at the Adolphus Hotel. The authors make this demonstration by hissing, spitting blue-haired women appear an incident of high drama and high danger, if not high treason. Contrast Robert Caro's treatment of the incident in *The Passage of Power*: Caro makes it clear that LBJ exploited the gathering of women "protestors" for political advantage, turning a relatively trivial incident into a headline event that would help him gain sympathies throughout the rest of Texas.

Another incident central to the authors' thesis occurred when Adlai Stevenson was confronted by anti-UN protestors weeks before JFK's fatal visit. According to the authors, Cora Stevenson managed to "slam" a protest sign into Stevenson's face. Watch the incident on Youtube -- it was recorded -- and the incident is more laughable than criminal. Not defensible, but not a serious attack.

I hold no torch for the City of Dallas or for Southern conservatives, now or in the past. But I do expect history to be accurate and even-handed. The authors turn all of JFK's opponents into cardboard cut out crazies. Anyone with more than a touch of liberalism is turned into a plaster saint. The ultra-wealthy Stanley Marcus of Neiman Marcus seems to be lionized because he dines at French restaurants and exploits "internationalism" to sell expensive consumer goods. Every Civil Rights worker is a paragon of virtue. In contrast, every conservative opponent of the UN, Civil Rights or JFK is totally demonized. The authors to a large degree disregard the times in which the historical actors were operating, the cultural values and international fears of the period in which they formed their values, the laws that actually existed in 1963 (before much Civil Rights legislation had been passed). The southern opponents of "progress" may have been indefensibly misguided, and on the wrong side of history, but it is hard to believe that they were the one-dimensional zealots that the authors would have us believe. And certainly they would have had reason to distrust and dislike the young and inexperienced JFK.

As for the hotbed of hatred created by the "crazies," it turns out that upon JFK's arrival on the morning of November 22, 1963, Dallas gave the Kennedys an extraordinarily warm welcome, showing that the currents of hatred that were swirling in Dallas were not mainstream. And, of course, the authors swallow the proposition that JFK was killed not by any conservative but by a left-wing communist, accepting the simplistic fairy-tale version of the Warren Report. Certainly no evidence is presented that anything in the "climate" of Dallas accounted for JFK's assassination.

So what is this book really about? Not much of anything. If I could give it 1-1/2 stars I would. Unlike a real history book, this volume inspires no trust in the truth of the information or the authors' analysis of it. It will of course be adored by young readers who will hear what they want to hear: good is great and bad is awful. Was it underwritten by MSNBC?

Mark says

This book is an appalling examination of the political landscape of Dallas in the years leading up to the Kennedy assassination. Anyone looking for the roots of modern American fascism would be well advised to read this book carefully, as it describes in detail the toxic political culture that formed the breeding ground for modern Republican lunacy. The utter savagery with which the Dallas populace greeted vice presidential candidate LBJ and later U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson will seem eerily familiar to the readers of the current sickening headlines emanating from Iraq.

After the Stevenson visit, the more moderate afternoon newspaper, the Dallas Times Herald, published a front-page apology: "Dallas has been disgraced. There is no other way to view the storm trooper actions of last night's frightening attack on Adlai Stevenson... this misconstrued, misguided brand of 'patriotism' is dragging the name of Dallas through the slime of national dishonor."

Among the outright psychotics profiled in the book, Major General Edwin Walker stands out as being one of the most interesting. This WWII general, a committed John Bircher and dedicated segregationist, fired by Kennedy, resigns his commission and runs for office. After failing miserably, Walker resorts to outright treason, becoming a leader of the rabble protesting the integration of University of Mississippi:

"The standoff represents the most serious challenge to federal authority since the Civil War. Governor Barnett, belatedly recognizing the seriousness of the situation, begins desperately negotiating in secret with the Kennedy brothers to reach a face-saving settlement. And General Edwin A. Walker of Dallas decides that this is a moment he should and will seize—it is the perfect cause to use to personally confront John Kennedy, and to rescue Dallas and the rest of the South from enforced integration."

Other howling lunatics haunting the pages of this book include the well-known Howard Hunt, who, in addition to being an oil billionaire, was a part time novelist. In his magnum opus, Hunt tells the story of

"Alpaca...his own country with the perfect form of government. The men who amass the greatest wealth receive more votes than anyone else—up to seven votes each. The bottom 40 percent of taxpayers get no votes at all. The wealthy can purchase additional votes if they desire. Few government services exist in Alpaca—not even public schools. And, finally, the nation must enshrine the "oil depletion allowance"—a massively lucrative tax break for Texas oilmen—as part of the constitution. It is, in fact, the highest law of the land. "The people of Alpaca... were generally happy with the new Constitution," he writes. I'm pretty sure the Republican party would get right behind this platform!

The reader of this book will understand all too clearly why Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, but will be left wondering how Kennedy could have been so blind to the mortal danger posed by that outlaw city. Adlai Stevenson questioned the wisdom of Kennedy's planned Dallas visit: "There was something very ugly and frightening about the atmosphere," he says. He mentions that he had talked to Stanley Marcus and other leading people in Dallas. There was uncertainty, some dread, in Dallas. "They wondered whether the President should go to Dallas," Stevenson says. "And so do I."

Well written book, with the brisk, driving pace of a thriller. Essential reading for anyone looking to gain more insight into the modern sickness that characterizes the Republican party.

Bryan says

Excellent book. Well researched and well written. It also came across as being non-partisan, not an easy feat given the atmosphere in Dallas in 1963, which was definitely radical right. What is most amazing about this book is that most of the vitriol aimed at JFK sounds almost word for word like the hate currently being spewed at Obama by the far right. It seems like the political scene really never changes much. This is a must read for anyone with an interest in the political climate in Dallas leading up to the assassination of JFK.

Earl Russell says

History with Shocking Parallels to Today

Bill Minutaglio and Steven L. Davis have accomplished something that few know and that many should know. They have laid out a history preceding the assassination of John F. Kennedy that is compelling to the core and that has truly frightening parallels to today.

Perhaps more astounding, after a half century of avid reading and being a lifelong news junkie, I knew almost none of the history that came alive in Dallas 1963. Over the last half century, many of the events leading up to the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath have been simply repeated in the news media from one anniversary observance to another.

Minutaglio and Davis marked a sharp departure from rehashing old news. They both are journalists and scholars, and both are gifted storytellers. They have an exceptional gift for dramatic reporting of complex, intertwined events. They make sense of them in Dallas 1963.

This book is a must-read for all who are deeply concerned about the rancorous political climate in the United States and other parts of the world. Dallas 1963 is a cautionary tale about the importance of returning to reason, thoughtful deliberation, respectful disagreement, a lowering of voices, and shared responsibility.

This book contributes something fresh and new and powerful. I give it my highest recommendation.

Earl B. Russell, Author
Cold Turkey at Nine

Jeremy says

This review is of an Advance Reading Copy.

An engaging biography of a place and a time that feels both distant and contemporary at once. The authors chronicle the leading business, media and political figures living in Dallas in the first three years of the 1960's.

As a reader, who was not yet born at the time I thought they did a remarkable job explaining the characters

points of view and bringing the world to life. The politics and personalities are always accessible - even when some of the ideas expressed by some historical figures are mildly abhorrent.

The story is told with astonishing depth, but at the same time an economy of language that give the book a vibrant pace. I'm sure these guys could write academic prose if they desired, but they're not afraid to 'twitterize' the story to keep the pages turning.

Although the book focuses on events of 50 years ago, like any good historical biography it's not afraid to remind us that while we may think the times we live in are uniquely tumultuous, there really is nothin new under the sun.

Linster says

Reading a nonfiction book, especially of a historical/political nature, in a weekend is unheard of for me. But this book grabbed me and wouldn't let go until I finished.

No, it's not a masterpiece. The book is written in present tense (most of the time) and gets confusing. I guess they tried to set it in Dallas 1963, but I found myself having to reread sections to figure that out.

That said, I am still a bit shaken after finishing the book yesterday. The parallels between then and now are striking - so much so that trying to list them would make this review exceed the character allowance. But some of the comments from the far right concerning Kennedy are so close to what the Tea Party says about Obama that I wonder if we are destined to repeat history.

A personal revelation is that many of the landmarks and buildings in Dallas (where I live) are named after right wing extremists from the 60s. And that I, as a little Baptist girl, visited in the home of one of the most virulent, H.L. Hunt. Dallas was built on the shoulders of these people. No wonder people hated the city.

One note - this is not a book about the assassination, per se. It's about the atmosphere that led up to November 22, 1963, and the seeming inevitability of the attack on the president. Chilling stuff.

Joseph Raffetto says

I learned a great deal about the extremism that exploded in Dallas after John F. Kennedy was elected president. Dallas was ground zero for Kennedy hatred in 1963; it was led by the John Birch Society; a rabid military nut, General Edwin Walker; the publisher of the Dallas Morning News, Ted Dealey; the Texas oil man, H.L. Hunt; and many others.

It was also a city that attracted a strip club owner, Jack Ruby, and, of course, Lee Harvey Oswald.

This fine piece of journalism and research is a well-written and fast-paced read. It focuses on the insanity of the forces on the right, but there were good people, too, including Stanley Marcus, founder of Neiman Marcus, who warned LBJ that JFK should not visit Dallas because of the right-wing radicals rampant in the

city.

Hilary says

Dallas 1963 is not a book about JFK's assassination but depicts the poisonous political and cultural climate leading up to it. The author focuses on the paranoid fear, hatred and anger of Kennedy drummed up by H.L.Hunt, world's wealthiest oil baron & reclusive bigamist; General Edwin Walker, former Army general who some say "Seven Days in May" is based on; extremist Congressman, Bruce Alger; racist, homophobic Baptist minister, W.A.Criswell and Ted Dealey, owner of "Dallas Morning News" who sees a Communist under every tumbleweed. Yes, that Dealey Plaza. Even the powerful and stylish Stanley Marcus of Neiman Marcus is helpless to stem the tide of intolerance he sees in his beloved city. Pull back the curtain and one can see that most of the hate and vitriol is about integration and the white establishment fighting the changes under the auspices of "stemming the tide of Communism in our government." Imagine my disbelief when I read that General Curtis LeMay advocated the U.S. making a preemptive strike against Russia. Hit first, he recommended although realizing Russia would have time to retaliate and there would be "collateral damage" here. Ah, it's a dandy group of lunatics.

It's a political book about mob mentality and the dangers of power in the wrong hands. If you're interested in the Kennedy assassination it's a must read. A well paced, page turner and a cautionary tale for own times.

Gus Breymann says

Focusing on former army general Edwin A. Walker, "Dallas Morning News" publisher Ted Dealey, weird oilman H. L. Hunt, extremist Congressman Bruce Alger, and racist Baptist preacher W. A. Criswell, this is a story of political power, rabid racism, paranoia, anti-communism, ultra-right conservatism and wealth in Dallas between 1961 and 1963. There are parallels in Texas in 2013, perhaps explaining why the co-authors wrote this book in the present tense. For those of us who were in Dallas on November 22, 1963, or nearby in Texas, the story is a refresher course with new details. For others, it will be revelation. Particularly interesting portions are: (1) Ted Dealey's offensive verbal attack on JFK at a White House luncheon with publishers; (2) Lee Harvey Oswald's stalking of Edwin Walker on Turtle Creek Blvd. in Dallas; (3) Adlai Stevenson's terrible maltreatment by Dallasites; (4) Walker's arrest for sedition in Mississippi and his subsequent, brief psychiatric hospitalization; and (5) Representative Alger's role in the mink coat protest against LBJ at the Baker Hotel. The book would have been even more interesting if it had expanded on an important reason JFK went to Dallas at all: the political feud involving LBJ, Governor John Connally, and Senator Ralph Yarborough. Narrative concerning Reverend Rhett James and activist Juanita Craft, while interesting and positive, takes a clear back seat to the main theme of the book: hatred and absolutism. James and Craft, along with Stanley Marcus, are the book's heroes. Dallas did not kill President Kennedy, but the Citizens Council did everything it could to foment opposition to the president's visit to a fever pitch on that beautiful, sunny, dreadful afternoon in Dallas.
