



## **Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years**

*David Talbot*

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For decades, books about President John F. Kennedy or his brother Robert Kennedy have woven either a tale of Camelot or a tawdry tale of ambition & reckless personal behavior. But the real story of the Kennedys in the 1960s has been submerged.

"Brothers" sheds light on the inner life of the Kennedy presidency & its aftermath. Talbot, founder of Salon.com, has written a political history sure to be talked about. It begins on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, as a stricken Robert urgently demands answers about his brother's assassination. His suspicions focus on the nest of CIA spies, gangsters & Cuban exiles who'd long plotted a violent regime change in Cuba. The Kennedys had struggled to control this swamp of anti-Castro intrigue based in South Florida, but with little success. It then shifts back in time, revealing the shadowy conflicts that tore apart the Kennedy administration, pitting the president & his brother against their own national security apparatus.

The brothers & a small circle of their trusted advisors -- men like Theodore Sorensen, Robert McNamara & Kenny O'Donnell, who were so close as to be regarded as family -- repeatedly thwarted Washington's warrior caste. These hard-line generals & spymasters were hell-bent on a showdown with Communism -- in Berlin, Laos, Vietnam & especially Cuba. But the Kennedys frustrated their militaristic ambitions, pushing for a peaceful resolution to the Cold War. The tensions within the administration were headed for an explosive climax, when gunfire in Dallas terminated JFK's presidency.

Based on over 150 interviews -- including many of the Kennedys' aging band of brothers, whose testimony here may be their final word on this political story -- as well as newly released government documents, "Brothers" reveals the untold story of those years, including JFK's efforts to keep the USA out of war & RFK's secret quest to solve his brother's murder. Bobby's subterranean search was a dangerous one & led, in part, to his own campaign in 1968 leading to his own death. RFK may have been the victim of the same plotters he suspected of killing his brother.

This is history at its best -- meticulously researched, movingly told. It's a sprawling narrative about the clash of powerful men & the darker side of the Cold War -- a tale of tragic grandeur that will change understandings of the Kennedy saga.

## Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years Details

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## From Reader Review Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years for online ebook

### Caroline says

This is a very very good book, insightful, thought-provoking, interesting and very moving. I found myself in tears at more than a few points. It's about Jack and Bobby Kennedy and their relationship throughout 'the Kennedy years'.

History seems to have sidelined Bobby and his murder over the years - the attention has always been on JFK and his assassination - but the way this book looked at Bobby broke my heart. Because Jack was his whole world, his primary focus - and when Jack was murdered Bobby was absolutely bereft. And then he pulled himself together, set about on a political career of his own and set out after the White House, all so he could continue his brother's legacy, and was then murdered himself.

\*sniffles\*

It just shouldn't have happened and it breaks my heart to think about what the US would have been like had they lived.

And yes, I do think there was a conspiracy, and I blame the CIA.

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### B. Hallward says

A fascinating book about the Kennedys that includes a hair-raising picture of the inner workings of the American government during the cold war, barely controlled generals pushing for nuclear war, a CIA answerable to no one. A great strength of this book is how it isn't framed as an argument for a particular conspiracy theory; instead it argues that the Warren report was an insulting failure to seriously investigate what happened, that the CIA lied to and successfully stonewalled generations of official inquiry boards representing the American people, and the a lazy, contemptibly passive media was willing to swallow whatever official line they were given.

But, on another level, it's a rich complicated portrait of the Kennedy brothers, both their aspirations and their failures. Clearly sympathetic without fawning, it reveals JFK and RFK as people who had a powerful vision of peace and social justice in an era of painful turmoil and deep hatreds.

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### Erik Graff says

This book is both a biography of the Kennedy brothers, John and Robert, from 1961 until 1968, and a review of their assassinations and the controversies surrounding them. Along the way the author, a believer in a conspiracy linking both murders, documents how RFK himself subscribed to such beliefs as regards the events of 22 November, 1963.

Author David Talbot is also a believer in the Kennedy brothers themselves. Although he deals briefly with

the promiscuity of the elder, even mentioning rumors of his use of psychoactives, he fails to address how this behavior could, if revealed by those in the know in the FBI, CIA and the press, have led to his downfall in the intended 1964 campaign. As regards potential sexual scandals involving the younger brother there is not a word. Instead, he focuses on claims that one or both of them were involved in the assassination attempts against Castro, discounting all of them. There's no question that the CIA, domestic mobsters and disaffected Cubans were gunning for Fidel, the question for Talbot is instead to identify precisely which spooks, crook and terrorists had included the brother Kennedys in their hit list—and why.

The answer to the question of motive and the identification of the murderers is not precisely given in this book. Motives abound, the virtues of the Kennedys being their crimes in the eyes of the many suspects considered. These virtues included, in Talbot's eyes, the courageous attempts for reconciliation with the Communists, the rejection of policies of military and economic aggression against third world nations, the prosecution of organized crime and the promotion of civil rights—all of which set teeth on edge in certain circles.

While I, like Reeves in his *A Question of Character*, would emphasize such concerns more than Talbot does, the idea that both Kennedys matured positively towards the end of their careers, an idea shared by both authors, is an attractive one. One would like to think that their deaths, and the grief of millions, meant something.

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### **Othón León says**

This book made go back to one of my favourite periods of US politics and characters as well. Very well written and very well researched in my opinion (not being an expert on the subject but having read many books on the matter I say that...). The book recounts the origins of the Kennedy family and the developments that took John to the White House and Robert to the State Department as well as the implications of them taking sides during those years in reference to diverse groups of power. Of course the book recounts John's assassination and goes well after it to describe the pain that Bobby carried with him and that according to the author, never left him, implying even that he "knew" he was going to share the same fate than his brother John. I loved this book.

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### **KOMET says**

This is a well-documented, heavily researched book that looks into what the Kennedy Years were really like in this country between JFK's election to the Presidency in 1960 and the assassination of his brother, Robert Kennedy, in June 1968.

Though I was born several months after President Kennedy's assassination, I have had an interest in his life and political career since I was a child. And in subsequent years as my knowledge of President Kennedy's life and presidency has grown and deepened, I have grown in admiration and respect for what he (and Robert Kennedy, as the Attorney General and presidential special advisor) was able to achieve and tried to accomplish in the best interests of the U.S.

Talbot goes to great lengths in this book to show the obstacles and challenges --- many of them from within the government itself -- that the Kennedys encountered to their policies and proposals. This became more

pronounced in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis when President Kennedy resolved to embark on "a strategy of peace", which he spoke of so eloquently in his "Peace Speech" at American University on June 10, 1963. Indeed, within weeks of this speech, the basis of a limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was worked out between Washington and Moscow on August 5, 1963. And in the following month, the Senate approved the treaty by a resounding 80 to 19 margin.

President Kennedy was seen as a threat by influential elements within the Pentagon, the CIA (which --- following the failure of its Bay of Pigs invasion plan and JFK's dismissal of its Director, Allen Dulles, in November 1961 --- became brazenly disdainful of the President and resistant to his tentative efforts to try and reform the Agency), and elements of the anti-Castro Cuban exile community. War and the promoting of the threats of war were big business at the time. After all, we were living at the height of the Cold War. And the Pentagon, the CIA, and the anti-Castro Cuban exile community profited from that. The Kennedys could have opted to "go with the flow" by not challenging the prevailing ethos in political circles and the government itself, likely ensuring themselves a longer tenure in the White House. Yet, both came to perceive through the ongoing civil rights struggle against racial segregation in the country and in their own efforts to crack down on the Mafia - as well as addressing a host of other international and domestic crises and challenges - that the country could not go on as it had since 1945. Indeed, it was President Kennedy who said that "those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable." Consequently, President Kennedy was marked for assassination - not by Moscow or Havana, but by a powerful clique in this country made up of business, military and political leaders invested in maintaining what Eisenhower spoke of in his Farewell Address as "the military-industrial complex." So along with the CIA and the Mafia, they conspired and hatched a plan that killed a President riding in an open motorcade in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

"BROTHERS" takes the reader through that tragic day in Dallas, and illustrates how Robert Kennedy was deeply traumatized by his brother's death. What I found especially interesting as I was reading this section of the book was that, from the moment Robert Kennedy learned of his brother's death (via a phone call from J. Edgar Hoover, whose tone of voice conveyed in no uncertain terms, that he no longer considered himself beholden to the younger Kennedy as Attorney General) that he immediately suspected that JFK had been killed as a result of a conspiracy. That I did not know before reading this book. The reader then becomes part of the painful journey Robert Kennedy undertakes, not only to come to terms with his brother's death, but to continue the fight against the dark elements within the government itself. Kennedy bided his time, resigned his post in the Justice Department, and won election to the U.S. Senate from New York in 1964. Robert ("Bobby") Kennedy's evolution proceeded apace. Indeed "[i]n the last years of his life, Bobby Kennedy became increasingly estranged from Washington's political elite. His growing commitment to a new, multiracial America - which allied him with the crusade of Martin Luther King Jr. - was viewed with alarm by J. Edgar Hoover, who regarded both men as dangerous. And his critique of American foreign policy, ... drew the baleful eye of the White House and CIA."

For anyone who wants a deeper understanding as to why both Kennedy brothers remain an inspirational and relevant force in our politics and in the consciousness of many Americans and admirers across the world, **READ THIS BOOK**. It made startlingly clear to me their extraordinary fearlessness and unique humaneness as leaders who sought to build and ensure a better, safer world for all people.

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## **Eric says**

Aint no two, three of four ways about it.

The American military Industrial complex pumped bullets into President John F. Kennedy, splattering his brains all over his wife.

Then, when his brother Bobby( who wanted to be president in large part to find out who killed his brother) got close to winning, they killed him too.

Oh and they killed a few of Kennedy's girl friends along the way because they had too much influence on him.

This book is well researched, well written by a noted writer

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### **Thomas says**

This is a unique look at the Kennedys from within the Kennedy camp. We witness the major events of our era through the eyes of Robert Kennedy and the close-knit "band of brothers."

While this book doesn't settle the issue of the John Kennedy Assassination, it establishes who the Kennedy clan and its allies felt was responsible. RFK firmly believed "they" killed his brother. Whatever the reader's opinion of the event, it is interesting to view RFK's life and career as products of that belief.

I was impressed both with the level of research and with the writing style. Though a great deal of information was presented, Brothers moved along very quickly.

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### **Sandra Cox says**

This book lets the reader know about the political climate of the 60s which forced the Kennedy brothers into decisions they didnt want to make and some that they did. They wanted the US to get past the Cold War fear that the military and CIA wanted us to feel. Lots of JFK's speeches leading up to VietNam are pertinent today. I only wish we were still trying to be a peaceful nation which is what Kennedy wanted more than anything else. Thats why he made such strides in getting along with Khruschev, Castro, etc. The CIA were the ones who wanted to assassinate Castro . All of this leads up to the major reasons JFK was killed.

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### **Roger DeBlanck says**

Of the dozens of books I've read on the Kennedys, David Talbot's research stands out as the most insightful and original in breaking new ground. He introduces unknown and, indeed, "hidden" information on the Kennedy brothers and the Kennedy presidency and administration. I learned of incidents that I had not found discussed in other resources. The history, which Talbot covers in gripping language and detail, truly captures the essence of secretive events. The accounts and encounters Talbot relays are fascinating, shocking, and downright haunting at times. A few minor examples: Bobby Kennedy's face-to-face meeting with Jimmy Hoffa on a runway tarmac, JFK's wild experimentation with mind-altering drugs, Jack Ruby's tangential connection with the mob, or Jackie and Bobby peering into Jack's coffin before the burial. One reads this meticulously constructed biographical history and comes away revering Kennedy for the great sacrifice towards peace he strove to achieve and at other times feeling wrath and disgust against him for the reckless

and unruly personal lifestyle he carried on. At no point in the narrative does Talbot resort to ridiculous, unsubstantiated conspiracies. He merely conveys and delivers the facts with unblinking objectivity and deft storytelling skill. Talbot accomplishes an amazing feat of probing deeper to discover these new secrets and details, more so than any other book in the vast field of literature on Kennedy. This book is a standout study of investigative research that adds itself to the dense library of seemingly never-ending resources on the Kennedys.

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### **JwW White says**

This book will convince most skeptical readers that there was a conspiracy behind the assassination of President Kennedy. Different readers might come to different conclusions about who was behind the assassination (other than Oswald), but the author lays out a complex web of things that are too many and too connected to be coincidence. Adding credence to the author's claims is the fact that reputable mainstream researchers have recently exposed the gaping holes and unexamined areas in the Warren Commission's findings. Also backing up his thesis is the fact that the House Subcommittee on Assassinations concluded that there was a conspiracy (a fact most reporters chose to ignore and one that silently disappeared).

Far too many news reporters and laypersons today choose to ignore the all-important question of who killed JFK and why. This is sad not just for the sake of history, but for the fact that the issue has immense implications concerning who really runs the U.S. Government.

The book was well written, dense with facts and research, and balanced in its approach.

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### **Pete daPixie says**

Great book! If you are reading this review, and you have not read David Talbot's 'Brothers', then I strongly recommend that you get hold of a copy. It is of no consequence even if you are, like me, not American. This 'Hidden History of the Kennedy Years' is everyone's history, for every nationality, for every generation.

My own personal belief, that has grown stronger with the years is President John Kennedy saved my life. As a snotty nosed English kid aged nine years old he was my hero after the crisis of 62. In later years my appreciation of Camelot, it's tragedy and it's legacy has grown. My visit to the U.S. was to Dallas, where I explored Dealey Plaza and it's grassy knoll, the Texas Book Depository and stood on Zapruder's plinth. I've prowled around Oswald's house, scene of the Tippit shooting and the Texas Theatre. I've met and spoken with Oswald's FBI contact James Hosty. I've met a third victim of the shooting in the Plaza, James Teague. I have met doctors from Parkland Hospital and U.S.Navy medical staff present at the autopsy of the President at Bethesda. So, dear reader, I'm a conspiracy nut, a term given to those who do not accept the authorised view of events and in this case I'm quite happy with the term. I have listed the names of people I believe to have been involved with the assassination in '63, long before reading Talbot's book and it is reassuring to find this author's list concurred with mine.

So, back to the book review. 'Brothers' published 2007, is a thought provoking and poignant biography of the gallant struggle of the Kennedy years. To echo my own beliefs there is a quote from Arthur Schlesinger "JFK had a great capacity to resist pressures from the military. He simply thought he was right. Lack of self confidence was never one of Jack Kennedy's problems. We would have had nuclear war if Nixon had been

president during the missile crisis. But Kennedy's war hero status allowed him to defy the Joint Chiefs. He dismissed them as a bunch of old men."

One of the great strengths of this work is the great number of interviews with the Kennedy 'band of brothers' as well as the Kennedy haters. Another quote from RFK from 1968 "I found out something I never knew. I found out that my world was not the real world." Well Bobby, I've found that out too. After Dallas, after the Ambassador Hotel, after Watergate, after Iraq and the never ending war on terror, the real world is subjected to concealed dark forces in thrall to agencies and corporate design that are not subject to law and ballot box.

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## **David says**

I bought this book quite a long time ago and it's taken me a few years to read: discovering – after I took the book home – that the book dabbled with conspiracy theories about JFKs assassination in November 1963 did rather put me off for a long time. After all, conspiracy theories about the President's murder always had something of the air of a media circus about them and my sense was that most serious people accepted that the crime was committed by the lost and erratic Lee Harvey Oswald.

Having come to the end of the book, I'm now very sorry to have left it so long: it's a thoroughly researched and by no means credulous work of the highest order. One revelation for example is just how much of an establishment consensus quickly formed that Kennedy's death was the result of a conspiracy: Robert Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson (JFKs successor) and Richard Nixon all believed this as did many of the Kennedy's most intimate associates. Of course, the people I mention here all had their own well-documented issues and just because they apparently believed in a conspiracy doesn't mean that there necessarily was one. But the number of high profile people who smell something rotten about the whole affair the closer they get to it is one of the most intriguing features of Talbot's book (another such detail is the alarming number of seemingly premature deaths that seems to go hand in hand with later attempts to investigate the assassination, including of course that of the President's brother Robert on the night he accepted the Democratic nomination for President).

As the above paragraph demonstrates, this book doesn't escape some of the major problems with JFK conspiracy writing: there's lots of scope for innuendo and dressing up suspicious coincidences as fact and the last few pages introduce so many potential suspects that it all starts to feel rather ridiculous. Talbot's aware of the first danger I think and doesn't pretend that he is has the answer. I would say though that this book is more rewarding for the journey it takes the reader on than the destination it gets you too at the end.

I've spent a lot of this review talking about the assassination of President Kennedy - and this is clearly a motivating engine for the book - but "Brothers" is mostly devoted to telling the story of the two brothers' lives at the top of American politics. Talbot makes a convincing and passionate case for the Kennedys' example in response to the revisionism of recent years. It's interesting to reflect that in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK establishes himself as the only president of the post-war years to stand against the bloodthirsty hollering of his mutinous military establishment, although he was derided as weak and inexperienced for doing so. Consider how Lyndon Johnson failed that test over Vietnam, and how George W. Bush went along so gleefully with that establishment over Iraq and you start to wish more world leaders would show such "inexperience". In fact, given later revelations that the Russians had a far more extensive arsenal of nuclear weapons in Cuba at the time than anyone knew, Kennedy's strength of character here clearly saved the world from a nuclear holocaust. RFK, too, comes across as a remarkable character – the rare politician to actually become radicalised the closer he got to power (his involvement with the growing civil rights movement is particularly notable in this regard) and one whose own slaying has always struck me

as an even greater loss to the world than that of his brother.

Was this radicalism, this strength of character in the face of the great military-industrial complex enough to get the brothers killed by a conspiratorial alliance between the CIA, the Mafia and a cabal of radicalised Cuban exiles? Despite dragging up some intriguing but deeply frustrating near-confessions from suspects who might well have found themselves on the edge of such a conspiracy if it happened, Talbot cannot ultimately answer that question. But the story he tells in trying to answer it is at turns thought-provoking, deeply irritating, and profoundly inspiring. I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

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### **Diane says**

Anyone interested in a well researched account of the Kennedy assassinations, the relationship between JFK and RFK, and the inner workings of our government should read this book. After reading it, I am convinced that both JFK and RFK were extraordinary, though flawed men, whose murders were never truly solved.

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### **Tom says**

Beyond reading summaries and a few critiques of the Warren Commission report when it was first issued, I had never delved deeply into the speculation about who really killed John F. Kennedy, and, later, Robert F. Kennedy. David Talbot's wide-ranging book offers an insightful way to revisit and catch up on the awful events. He provides no conclusive answers but leans heavily toward a suspicion that the JFK plot involved either CIA agents, anti-Castro Cuban immigrants or the Mafia, or perhaps an alliance of two or all three groups. He touches very briefly on the possibility that Lyndon Johnson may have been involved, but doesn't give it much attention. Interestingly, he passes over the possibility that Richard Nixon, who, of course, hated Kennedy, might have played a role, except to include a cryptic quote from Nixon that implied Tricky Dick may have had some inside knowledge.

His reporting and analysis of RFK's murder is more cursory and superficial. He is skeptical Sirhan Sirhan hatched the plot completely on his own, but is sketchy about who might have set up the hit, and why. As both assassinations fade into history, probably few Americans under 50 care that much about what happened and why. Talbot's concluding chapter faults the media for failing to press thorough, independent inquiries of their own. He is particularly hard on Benjamin Bradlee, JFK's personal friend, who conceded he didn't launch a Watergate-scale investigation because he feared it could damage his own budding career and image at the Washington Post. Talbot also scolds the Kennedy Library for continuing to restrict access to key archives that could shed more light.

The book provides a vivid look at the strong bond between JFK and RFK and the young men who made up their staffs. It shows how Bobby suspected CIA involvement right from the day his brother was shot, yet felt he would not be able to move effectively against any CIA culprits until he became president. He skips lightly over the attitudes of Ted Kennedy, and Jacquelyn Kennedy, so the reader is left to wonder why they didn't pursue their own exposé. Paralyzed by grief, or intimidated by the fear they could be next?

In short, the book, in spite of its limitations, causes us to question whether the CIA has been tamed or is still a threat to our constitutional government. And with the new US-Cuba détente in place and growing stronger, is there any lingering danger from anti-Castro diehards?

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## Louise says

This book has 3 major sections. It begins with convincing analysis of the motivations of the Mafia, CIA and anti-Castro Cubans. The next part focuses on RFK, his response to his brother's assassination and his subsequent career. The last part describes and discusses the cover up. Talbot doesn't get into the theories of the bullets, the capture of Oswald, shady life of Ruby, etc. The author is not out to prove one theory or another.

The book shows RFK was successful in mafia prosecutions and was making its leadership uncomfortable. The mob and the CIA had already had a convenient partnership, unbeknownst to the executive and legislative branches, particularly in working with Cuban exiles. Talbot doesn't say much about the mafia's interests in pre-Castro Cuba, but this allied them with the Cuban exiles. Anyone who has ever worked in an organization with a new boss or undergoing change knows the passion of the old guard. The old guard in the CIA was filled with anti-communist fervor, self-righteousness and an amorality that first hit the public consciousness with the Watergate break in. When those involved in the Cuba projects realized JFK was not going to try another Bay of Pigs, they viewed JFK as they would any other national leader who didn't play their game.

Talbot shows how neither Kennedy (Pres and AG) could contain their "staff" who continued rogue operations. Certain CIA staff could barely contain their contempt for the executive branch and its new occupants. They secretly and brazenly carried on the work that neither the president or congress approved. The FBI Director, who should have been a direct report to RFK spied on him and curtailed his security upon his brothers' death.

New to me was how poor a job the CIA did on Cuba. With all the emphasis on killing Castro, quixotic ineffective ventures onto the island, the attempts of getting Oswald Cuban cover, etc. it totally missed the Russian build up of troops. Castro, as the only survivor of the principals of this episode, probably gets a good laugh out of this at our expense.

Talbot clearly loves the Camelot legend. Neither Kennedy can do much wrong in Talbot's eyes. Bobby's gloss of the Warren Report is dismissed as is the role of JFK's very un-Presidential conduct. He mentions LSD, which was new to me, but not Judith Campbell Exner, both examples of his unnecessarily playing with fire. Talbot gives Castro a benign treatment. While this is not a book about Castro, some recognition of the exiles' cause would have been appropriate.

I was struck by the role of the media because the more things change, the more they say the same. Ben Bradlee, a presumed friend of JFK dismisses his paper's silence on the matter because he had other priorities--- his career. I think this is the same modus operandi the press assumes now, taking the line of least resistance rather than finding the real story.

"Will the truth ever come out?" asks the news media... ironically the very institutions who's collective mission is to bring the truth to the public. Talbot is not optimistic about the truth coming out, speculating that concern for truth in these two assassinations will end with the Kennedy era generation.

This book is a very readable summary of the issues involved in the dual assassinations. I highly recommend it.

