

# Empires of Dirt



1863



1963



1968



1968

Historical Science-Fiction Thriller

**DENNIS MANSFIELD**

Empires of Dirt  
© 2021 Dennis Mansfield  
Release Date: 2022

Sequel of: "To Trust in What We Cannot See"

<https://www.iuniverse.com/en/bookstore/bookdetails/789613-to-trust-in-what-we-cannot-see>

***Empires of Dirt***  
***Dennis Mansfield***

***"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now..."***

*M.L. King Jr*  
*April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968*

***"It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake."***

*C.S. Lewis*  
*Surprised by Joy*

***"The mind of man makes his plan but God directs his steps."***

*The Tanakh*  
*Book of Wisdom, 16:9*

## ***Chapter 1: Election Night***

Election night was coming to a close. The windy November night seemed to be blowing change across the country

The votes for President had been tallied but not yet announced. Crowds surged, moving forward and sideways, like waves of amber grain, waiting for the announcement of who would lead the United States into the future.

The Republican nominee had years of national experience, a strong career as an officer in the U.S. Navy during wartime, years in elected office in the Senate and a quick and acerbic wit, not particularly handsome but not unpleasant. When asked what would happen if he'd lose this vital race for the Presidency, he quipped, "I'll go home and sleep like a baby...waking up every three hours, crying and screaming." The reporters smiled. They knew it was partially true.

The Democrat nominee was a rare find. A young man of color whose roots mixed in with the roots of the nation. A community organizer, by career, he didn't *really* give speeches, as did other candidates; he *preached* messages. Those messages thrilled his audiences. Throughout the campaign he spoke of "change and hope". And like every good "preacher", when it was time to pass the plate, the donations flowed. As the first black nominee of a major political party, he raised a *lot* of money. He raised even more votes. And he won.

His friend and campaign supporter, Rev. Jesse Jackson, stood in the thick crowd, standing so close to a couple who were waiving small American flags that his image was almost not visible to the television cameras. *Almost*. He knew what was happening. History was happening. And he was crying. Tears flowed and he didn't care. His wet face showed tears of amazement. An African American had just been elected to the Presidency of the United States.

Then the announcer's voice interrupted it all, directing all eyes to the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor to introduce for the first time the, umm. President-elect of the United States." He paused, the crowd could hear a catch in his voice, all stood silently still. He recovered. "... The President-elect of the United States and his wife, The Reverend M.L. King and our future First Lady

Coretta Scott King.” Jesse Jackson’s tears of joy were America’s tears, on the evening of *November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968*.

## **Chapter 2: November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963**

I’d seen the silent 8mm color motion picture sequence hundreds of times before; in fact, the whole world had.

Yet, somehow it didn’t resonate with me how beautiful *that* day actually was, after the early morning rain had faded away and the sun rose. This was one of the most unseasonably warm November days in recent Texas memory; it would provide an ironic backdrop to what would be one of the most chilling, bloody killings ever recorded. The 8mm motion picture sequence broadcast global pain into humanity’s soul.

Captured on film by a sportswear clothes manufacturer who originally believed that the morning rain would dampen any images he took, so he initially left his motion picture camera at home.

Later with the sun coming out, Abraham Zapruder was reminded by a co-worker to return to his residence and retrieve his new home-movie camera. He did so and arrived back to a very crowded Dealey Plaza, *just in time*; yet the only vacant spot he could find was atop a cement pedestal. He began filming.

The critically important 8.3 seconds of this 26 second silent film would be replayed and replayed by those in deepest personal sadness, as well as by unattached, clinical research and ballistics analysts; all trying to find out how President Kennedy’s assassination had happened. It simply made no sense. A loner killing the President? A conspiracy killing America? Neither case made any sense - not then, not now.

If we were to be successful, our assembled small group of spacetime travelers would ensure that Abraham Zapruder’s home movie would, in the *new-future*, only be seen by his kids and grandkids. As Abe might later say to them, “That was the day I saw JFK. A year later he was reelected to the Presidency.”

I stood in Dealey Plaza at 11:30 am on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963 across from where Zapruder would claim his perch, atop the cement pedestal. In one hour, I hoped to see a new history happen directly in front of me. Or more to the point, I planned to see the original *old-past not* happen.

Each day since 1898 the Texas Book Depository Building has loomed over the gently sloping streets of Elm Street and Commerce Street. The Dallas pedestrian plaza was often known as the *birthplace* of Dallas; the first home was built there, the first courthouse, too. In fact, the first post office, the first store and the first fraternal lodge were constructed on that gently sloping piece of dirt in the 1840's. Dealey Plaza had always represented life and birth.

The street signs each silently show their names; some of which in the existing spacetime continuum would soon rivet themselves to the collective conscience of the world. Other names, not so, yet all street signs would (unless we were successful) be used to transport the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States to his death. Love Field, Mockingbird Lane, Lemmon Avenue, Turtle Creek Blvd eventually veering to the right and becoming Cedar Springs Road. A left turn at Harwood St. a right turn on Main, a long journey to Houston St. where the shadow of the Old Red Museum of Dallas County provides noon-day shade for those resting in Dealey Plaza. Houston street lasts two short blocks until a left is taken onto Elm St. From that final intersection it's only a measurement of yards, sloping down, down into eternity.

Although built to display *birth*, Dealey Plaza would soon represent *death* – the grisly public death of a vibrant and youthful United States President. John F. Kennedy, 46, the youngest man elected to the U.S. Presidency; and unless history was changed, the youngest President to die in office. But he didn't have to. Not this time.

My spacetime travelling associates and I were committed to altering history in 1963 just as some of us had recently done, fifty short years ago, *last week*, in 1913. There were now eight of us, each with our own responsibility – Dr. Russell Gersema, Louise Abraham, Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl, John Hay, Jack Lewis, brothers Rick and Zack Besso and me, Will Clark.

We surveyed the plaza. Each walked to his or her station; we knew what to do. We'd planned it months ago, *earlier that week*.

I found it oddly comforting that as we'd recently been eyewitnesses in 1913 to the brutal, *yet needful* deaths of Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky and Tito in Vienna, we could harness the same science of spacetime travel to *save the lives* of specific key leaders; all of whom had *needlessly* been killed. Men who, as U.S. Presidents, could and would change history – if they were only allowed to live. Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, M.L. King, and Robert Kennedy.

To begin with, John F. Kennedy would not die today.

### ***Chapter 3: A Simple Matter of Timing***

My own Bell and Howell camera in hand, I took my place positioned below, across Elm Street and directly across from 'the grassy knoll', parallel to the concrete pedestal, upon which Abraham Zapruder soon would be standing, his camera in hand. Jack Lewis and Zack Besso joined me there.

I positioned myself to capture all images as the motorcade passed by, with President and Mrs. Kennedy, hopefully unharmed, in it.

Dr. Russell Gersema and John Hay took their positions near the corner of Houston and Main streets, across from each other in clear sight of the Secret Service attachment in the follow up vehicle. "Doc" had a collapsed white umbrella tucked under his right arm. This was the corner that would see the presidential limo turn right and slowly approach the Texas Book Depository building. Doc stood at the ready, as the Secret Service limo, following the President and Mrs. Kennedy, made its wide righthand turn onto petit Houston St. Doc's job was simple; to jump into the street, point his outstretched folded umbrella at the open 6<sup>th</sup> floor window. His script was simple; "*A sniper, a sniper – look up, there in the window on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. Police, police!*".

John Hay was further up the short block on Houston St. with a crystal-clear view of the sniper's nest. He carried a TOA Electric Microphone at the ready, to his side. He would then immediately raise it to his lips and keep repeating, "*Sniper at the 6<sup>th</sup> floor window. Commence firing.*"

Louise Abraham's role was to wait in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor breakroom of the Depository building. Hidden in her purse was a snub-nosed Smith & Wesson Victory Model .38 special revolver. Her job was simple. If needed, she would draw that handgun on Lee Harvey Oswald, should he escape the 6<sup>th</sup> Floor sniper's nest and make his way down to the breakroom. If the Secret Service failed to draw their handguns, as well as the lone AR15 aboard the Secret Service limo, and *if* the local police failed to draw their weapons, Oswald surely would begin his historical escape. She was ready to meet him in the breakroom and disable him with rounds to his legs or knees.

Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl and Rick Besso would be on the roof of the Records Building with a second Mannlicher Carcano rifle and a .38 caliber regulation police revolver. After the warning from Doc and John below, Putzi's goal was to take out Lee Harvey Oswald by a double-tap headshot with the police revolver, regardless of whether the Secret Service and the Dallas PD were slow to initiate response. Rick Besso's goal with the second Mannlicher-Carcano was to take scoped aim at any Secret Service member who attempted to grab the lone AR 15 in the Secret Service Detail limo. Zack knew his efforts were just insurance due to Colin McLaren's book, *The Smoking Gun*, in which he said that a Secret Service Agent accidentally killed JFK when the rifle firing started. There would be no possible chance for a mortal error by the Secret Service on *this* November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963. President Kennedy would survive this firefight, no matter what. From above *and* behind himself.

Jack Lewis and Zack Besso each had the same job. And it would only be necessary in the event of a complete failure by the other members which allowed the Presidential motorcade to continue down Elm St. past the concrete colonnade, upon which stood Abraham Zapruder. Lewis and Besso would leap from the curb where we were standing and Jack throw his young body over that of the 46-year-old President of the United States, absorbing any rounds fired, laying down his own life. Zack would throw his even younger body over the First Lady to protect her. Though Zack had many years to live, he was willing to lay his own life down, too.

We all hoped that it would not come to our friends sacrificing themselves, yet we knew that November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963 was *already* the day that one of the two men, C.

S. “*Jack*” Lewis, would indeed die, at least an older version of himself. There was nothing he could do in spacetime travel to stop an illness from ending his life. Stopping an assassin, yes. Ending kidney failure, no.

Young Jack Lewis demanded his role.

He scolded us earlier that morning in his Irish accent, “I have to do this. An older version of me will be with the Lord, an hour before President Kennedy dies. Jack Lewis of the present can do something to help Jack Kennedy live for the future” He paused, “Why should Jack Kennedy have to die, too? No, I won’t let that happen.”

For a split second the Biblical phrase creased across my mind, ‘There’s no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for another.’

23 years earlier, young Jack Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*, had written “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Lewis heard God clearly on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963.

The minutes moved on; our schedule was tied to those minutes. Jack Lewis and I could overhear the motorcycle policemen’s radios. Air Force One had landed. The President and Mrs. Kennedy were working the rope line. Then word came that the motorcade was leaving Love Field. My mind raced back to the list of inconsequential street names. We had 37 minutes.

11:50 am the slow-moving motorcade was leaving Love Field to Mockingbird Lane, Lemmon Avenue to Turtle Creek Blvd, then to Cedar Springs Road. On and on to where the shadow of the Old Red Museum of Dallas County provides noon-day shade for those resting in Dealey Plaza. Finally, at 12:27 the slow-moving presidential motorcade took a right on Houston St. just past that noonday sun’s shadow and possibly into a new history.

It unfolded right before our eyes.

On cue, Doc and John Hay stepped from their respective curbs along Houston St. and began delivering their lines, yelling, pointing up at the sniper’s nest in the 6<sup>th</sup>



Floor of the Texas Book Depository window. Combined with the chaos of the Dallas PD's shrill motorcycle sirens, sounds from Hay's electric megaphone suddenly and painfully roused a deaf world.

The cacophony of sound, motion and action on the curb made the response by the Secret Service accelerate rapidly. Presidential Agents drew their handguns; yet, rounds had not yet been discharged as they seemed to be seeking direction from superiors. Valuable milli-seconds ticked off. All eyes in the crowd were now looking directly at the open window on the corner of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Texas Book Depository Building. The sniper's face and upper torso were clearly visible. "*Commence firing,*" came the command over a megaphone.

Sweating profusely, Lee Oswald had just swung his 6.55 mm Mannlicher Carcano rifle from its former original perch to shoot Kennedy in the back of the head, facing down Elm St. to *now* pointing directly up at the motorcade on Houston St., straight into the face of the President of the United States. Putzi had Oswald in his sights; he squeezed off two rounds to Oswald's head, just as a chorus of other rounds from the ground level joined it.

Journalists don't agree on who actually fired the first round from the motorcade, but they all seemed to agree on who ordered it. Bill Decker certainly took the credit for it. It was reported by the media, Dallas County Sheriff J. E. "Bill" Decker shouted, "Commence firing". He supposedly did so from the back seat of the lead vehicle. But that's the media – they have to have somebody, *anybody*, be responsible.

Decker was the same lawman who helped direct another firefight 29-years before, on May 23, 1934 – when, based on his plan, law enforcement officers unleashed an equally powerful chorus of rounds and killed notorious murders Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow with concentrated firepower. Decker enjoyed telling his story; however, he only *planned* the Bonnie and Clyde ambush, but wasn't there. Today he was in the middle of this attempted Presidential ambush and made sure the media would know.

It actually wasn't Decker who shouted with an amplified voice in Dallas. God shouted through his own megaphone of pain and the would-be assassin felt it.

The President's Secret Service detail head, Agent Clint Hill, climbed over the back of the Lincoln limousine and covered the Kennedys with his body. Governor Connally and his wife crouched together and leaned into this protective scrum of other secret service agents, who joined Hill.

The Presidential motorcade took an immediate and frantic left onto Elm St. in front of a book depository building and raced to the Stemmons Freeway on-ramp, passing Jack Lewis, Zack Besso and me. My Bell and Howell played dueling cameras with the Zapruder camera directly across from us. He would never be known outside of his family; his 26 seconds of film eventually becoming of little interest to even himself – except for capturing a sunny November day in Dallas in 1963 as the President's car sped by, after an assassination attempt.

And C.S. Lewis did not have to lay his life down for another. Nor did Zack Besso.

Both the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor and the 6<sup>th</sup> Floor received hundreds of rounds from the motorcade as it made that quick left turn onto Elm Street. Later it was determined that three innocent eyewitnesses, Bonnie Ray Williams, Harold Norman and James Jarman, Jr. who were leaning out of windows to view the motorcade, one floor below the sniper, were all killed by the fusillade of law enforcement gunfire, killing the sniper as well. A lone woman standing at the base of the building, was fatally shot. Midge Galloway was a 22-year-old librarian at the Dallas Central Library. She'd come to see a friend who was supposed to meet her on the sidelines of the motorcade. They'd all be dead, but the President of the United States would still be alive.

Later that night during an evening press conference, law enforcement officers and members of the coroner's office reviewed their examination of the bullet riddled body of 24-year-old former U.S. Marine Lee Oswald. The coroner's office announced to the media that Oswald had 44 bullet holes in his body, two were clean head shots by a regulation handgun. Sheriff "Bill" Decker was *obviously* in attendance. People still remember Decker's response when he spoke to the press about the exact number of rounds in Oswald's body.

He chuckled and said matter-of-factly into the microphones bundled on top of the podium, "Well, that's one more bullet hole than we put in Bonnie and Clyde..."

Months later, it appeared that Lee Oswald may have squeezed off a single round from the Mannlicher Carcano's muzzle. No one was injured by "Oswald's shot", but the Secret Service's brand new and somewhat experimental Colt (ArmaLite Rifle) – the AR15 - received a round to the upper receiver parts of the weapon and was damaged beyond any use that day. Luckily, the inexperienced new agent who had just grabbed the unlocked weapon from the car's floorboard was not injured. The weapon was later determined as completely irreparable and destroyed.

Zack Besso was accurate with his "just in case" rifle shot.

Twelve minutes later, as our group met at a predetermined spot – tucked behind the now-unimportant grassy knoll, John, Doc, Louise, Putzi, Rick, Zack all stood together and made our way to the adjacent telluric current. Jack withdrew a card with his own signature on it. Next to his autograph was printed "The Kilns, 1938".

We stepped into the telluric current and were gone, through space and time.

### **Many chapters later...**

#### ***Chapter 14: A. Lincoln***

After Jack Lewis awoke and seemed as accepting as anyone could, of knowing one's own manner and day of death, we left the Besso Brothers' flat, Doc in the lead, Lewis near the end.

We walked the cobblestone streets of Vienna to Doc's townhouse. Different pivot-points were discussed, options were considered. We discussed the malevolent intruder who made himself present to us at the café after the murders. He was with us and then he wasn't.

We arrived at Doc's flat in short order and presented the broad options. My spacetime travelling team and I began researching additional items that might be important to a potential plan for delaying any pending end-of-world disaster in 2060.

We discovered that the year 1860 (when Lincoln was elected) and 1960 (when Kennedy would be elected) were key to understanding 2060 (the year when Isaac Newton penned would be the earliest that the world could end). History as it is currently written *and* as a direct result of these two Presidents' deaths, would be creating intense leadership voids. Disallowing the future world of being able to solve vital problems, would hurtle the earth towards its mathematically calculated ending, as predicted by one of the most brilliant men who had ever lived, Sir Isaac Newton.

In 1704 Newton wrote "It may end later, but I see no reason for its ending sooner" than 2060. These two hundred years from 1860 to 2060 would be filled with utterly terrible events of death and destruction. Armed conflict, both civil war and international war would rip apart much of the world.

Yet there was hope, right in front of us – in the pages of history. The John Hay/John Nicolay ten volumes on Lincoln's life gave us an incredible body of options to consider about Lincoln, through almost 4,600 pages of content in ten volumes. In the days to come we burrowed through those volumes, drew timeline maps on the sheets hung on the walls, looked at events in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in anticipation of how to postpone Armageddon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We did so, day after day. In Vienna. In 1913.

For 12 long days. It helped that C. S. Lewis was with us. His research skills were incredible.

The result of our review began with Abraham Lincoln but also included other historical leaders; John F. Kennedy, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr and U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the president; as well, Civil War Generals John Sedgewick and George Custer would survive – one by intention, one by accident. Six men whose shielding from gunshots would change the world.

The tactical nature of the plan involved President Kennedy escaping Dallas, Rev. King running for President and *not* stepping out on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, Sen. Bobby Kennedy running for President *later* than 1968 and winning and Gen. Grant's absence from Custer's life and therefore by not returning to his troops on The Plains he would survive by default. We had already saved General John Sedgewick's life in our previous spacetime adventure. Now, they could all

live and change history. The starting point, though, was President Abraham Lincoln.

Each day, we knew we became more successful working together as a group of researchers; the sheer volume of information was developed and key points were discovered or unveiled. Yet, we sensed we might need *at least* one additional researcher to join us with this project. The new member of our group needed to have intimate knowledge of Lincoln, and the international wars.

John Hay and John Nicolay's 10-volume work, *Abraham Lincoln A History*, held the key. Lincoln's two private secretaries were with him every day in the Civil War White House, making this collection of books a fascinating window through which we could, as eyewitnesses, review and study the 16<sup>th</sup> President.

Lincoln's rescue from death would have to be paramount in our research.

Rick said it best, when we took a break "Lincoln's death gave us Andrew Johnson, who had only been Vice President for 42 days. He was a foolish, uncouth man – in fact he was drunk when he was inaugurated!"

Louise asked Rick, "Wait, wasn't he Lincoln's Vice President the whole four years before?"

"Nope, that's what I'm telling you. Lincoln had an incredible man of integrity and knowledge during his first administration – Hannibal Hamlin from Maine and then he chose this contemptable man."

Louise continued, "You mean Lincoln dumped a perfectly fine incumbent Vice President in favor of a drunk?"

"Yeah, he did. It was a terrible decision, a moment of President Lincoln's worst display of weakness. He let the party bosses make the decision and they ingloriously ousted Hamlin."

Rick was showing his passion.

He continued, “Historians will explain away the decision as somehow important for national unity – a Southerner and a Northerner together, but they’d be wrong. Johnson brought the US to its knees after the Civil War and was the first president to be impeached in the House, though he missed conviction in the Senate by one solitary vote.”

Jack entered into the discussion, “With us stopping Lincoln’s assassination, not only will his life be saved but the United States Civil War would come to a far more peaceful end and by extension of that, a far better Reconstruction period in your nation’s history would happen. The volatile racial tensions, that grew generation after generation, of the post-emancipation years could be more quickly met and resolved with a man like Lincoln, or even his first Vice President – Hannibal Hamlin - for that matter.”

He paused, “We must keep reading through the research to see who might be our best choice to help save Lincoln’s life.” We all returned to our work.

It’s important to note that the subsequent efforts in Europe to wage international war through genocide on the Jewish race would also be thwarted as the nations of the world chose not to embrace international violence. Ernst Rohm wasn’t the only one who could avoid WWI, we determined; although *he* merely postponed the global conflict. The chain of leadership all returned to Lincoln. His continued life story would surely impact the 1870’s, 80’s and 90’s for the better, we felt.

We would direct our efforts to end war altogether. Millions more would live; generation after generation would claim their own plots of ground on which they would safely and securely raise their families, rather than their burial plots. This could be done by eliminating the global conflict, that we historically have called WWI.

We would therefore ensure that WWII did not happen, as well, was our logic. As a group, we felt that that the termination of the Civil War and the elimination of any international wars would free people from slavery and death; we genuinely saw that this could be accomplished. Rick Besso’s military training and combat experience didn’t dampen the spirit of peace that grew in our collective breasts. Instead, it strengthened us, “No one wants the elimination of armed conflict more than the soldier who fights in it,” Rick simply stated.

Jack, himself a wounded British veteran from World War I, lit his pipe and at the same time gave a loud *huzzah*, “You are completely accurate, Lieutenant Colonel.”

The sheer number of future grateful individuals living in peace seemed to assure those in our group that we could avoid an apocalypse, or at the least *postpone* one for many decades, and maneuver for ourselves (and our posterity) more time on this earth. That was our hope – lessen war, increase peace. It became our guiding light.

We knew it wouldn’t be easy, yet it could be simple. Most of life is just that. Death interrupts simplicity. And if we could help end that horrendously complex interruptive cycle of massive death, we could extend life.

First, we had to stop the single death of A. Lincoln.

U.S. Grant’s book would be the key to accomplishing that, *or so we thought*.

Empires of Dirt

© 2021 Dennis Mansfield