

On the 22nd of November, 1963 President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in plain sight, captured clearly by a Bell and Howell home-movie camera held by a Dallas clothing store owner.

All history was changed that day and presidential succession caused those many changes. But what if... Kennedy had not died?

This premise is the starting point to my second historical science fiction book, ***Empires of Dirt***. The book is a follow-up to my initial historical science fiction book, ***To Trust in What We Cannot See***, available on Amazon.

Please read the few pages I have provided below. Then, if they capture your interest, ***you may buy the ebook for \$7 by reaching out ONLY to Venmo or Zelle at the following addresses:***

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This is a highly unusual method for me in marketing my books and I think there's great value in ***Empires of Dirt***. - Dennis Mansfield

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By Dennis Mansfield

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Empires of Dirt



1863



1963



1968



1968

Historical Science-Fiction Thriller

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 3rd, 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

Section I

The New Story

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 5th, 1968*.

Chapter 2: Five Years Before

November 22nd, 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 22nd, 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 35th 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 Street a right turn on Main, a long journey to Houston Street 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 Street. 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, C. S. 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. John F. Kennedy would not die today.

Chapter 3: A Simple Matter of Timing

November 22nd, 1963

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, Doc's job was simple; to jump into the street, point his outstretched folded umbrella at the open 6th floor window. His script was simple; "*A sniper, a sniper – look up, there in the window on the 6th 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 6th floor window. Commence firing.*"

Louise Abraham's role was to wait in the 2nd 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 6th 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, identical to Oswald's 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. Rick knew his efforts were just insurance due to Colin McLaren's book, *The Smoking Gun*, in which the author 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 22nd, 1963. President Kennedy would survive this firefight, no matter what. From above *and* behind himself.

C. S. “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 22nd 1963 was *already* the day that one of the two men, C. S. “Jack” Lewis, would indeed die, at least the one version of him would die. 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 John F. Kennedy live for the future” He paused, “Why should President 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, a younger 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 22nd, 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.

Note: This book has been over three years in researching and writing.

It's a brain-teaser and was lots of fun to research and write. May it be interesting and fun for you to read!

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