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SURGEON WHO TRIED TO  
SAVE JFK AND OSWALD!**

# **JFK Conspiracy of Silence**

**Charles A. Crenshaw, M.D.**  
with Jens Hansen and J. Gary Shaw

Introduction by John H. Davis,  
author of *Mafia Kingfish*



SIGNET ★ 451-JE346  
(CANADA \$5.99) ★ U.S. \$4.99



# JFK

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A SIGNET BOOK

## SIGNET

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books USA Inc., 375 Hudson Street,  
New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane,  
London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood,  
Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road,  
Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:  
Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published by Signet, an imprint of New American Library,  
a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.

First Printing, April, 1992

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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*To the residents and attending medical staff  
of that era at Parkland,  
and to Dr. G. Tom Shires, the "Chief."*



# INTRODUCTION

The overwhelming majority of books on the John F. Kennedy assassination have been written by people who had no firsthand personal experience with the crime. Dr. Charles Crenshaw is one of the very few writers on the assassination who was directly involved in the tragic events of November 22-24, 1963, in Dallas. It was his fate, as a thirty-year-old surgeon, to assist in trying to save the lives of the mortally wounded President and his accused assassin in Dallas's Parkland Hospital. Dr. Crenshaw's book, then, is unique. It is the Kennedy assassination seen from one who lived it on the front lines, from one who was there twice, covered with blood and gore, trying desperately to rescue two men from death. As such it grants us a fresh new vision of what has come to be known as the "Crime of the Century."

Other writers have postulated that the President was struck by at least one, perhaps

two bullets, fired from the front, whereas the Warren Commission asserted Kennedy was struck twice from behind. Dr. Crenshaw, as one of the surgeons treating the President's wounds, saw with his own eyes that Kennedy was struck twice from the front: once in the neck and once in the right side of his head. This, of course, meant that Oswald had not acted alone. This firsthand observation is enough to make Dr. Crenshaw's book significant, but it by no means exhausts the revelations in *JFK: Conspiracy of Silence*.

As Dr. Crenshaw was battling to save the lives of John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald, some profoundly disturbing things happened in the trauma rooms in which he was working. While he was treating President Kennedy's wounds in Trauma Room 1, he observed a Secret Service agent roaming around the room brandishing a pistol cocked and ready to fire, while shouting and muttering to himself. Two days later, another armed individual was mysteriously present in the operating room while Dr. Crenshaw and his colleagues struggled to save Oswald from death. But these were relatively insignificant occurrences compared to the telephone call Dr. Crenshaw received while he was attending to Oswald's wounds.

In the midst of trying to save the accused assassin's life, Dr. Crenshaw was called to

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the phone in the hospital supervisor's office. When he picked up the receiver, he was astonished to find his caller was the newly sworn-in President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson brusquely told Crenshaw he wanted a deathbed confession from Oswald, and that there was a man in the room who would receive it. The doctor told the President he would do what he could. When he returned to his patient, he knew immediately he could not save Oswald and there would be no deathbed confession. The mysterious man with the pistol was hovering nearby waiting to take the confession. Dr. Crenshaw told him that Oswald was near death and there would be no confession. The mystery man then quickly disappeared.

What are we to make of this strange episode? Was Lyndon Johnson a plotter in a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy? Was Johnson trying to get a confession of sole guilt from Oswald that would strengthen the already-proclaimed official assertion that he was a lone-nut assassin? Was Johnson already trying to get himself off the hook?

These thoughts ran through Dr. Crenshaw's mind after Oswald was officially declared dead and the young surgeon left the operating room.

I do not believe the available evidence suggests that Lyndon Johnson helped plot the

assassination of President Kennedy, even though he had a lot to gain from Kennedy's death. I do believe, however, that Johnson was an accessory after the fact, that he was a willing participant in the governmental cover-up that followed the President's death.

It is now widely believed that Johnson's good friend, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, was most definitely an accessory after the fact in the assassination of President Kennedy. There is indisputable proof that Hoover withheld vital evidence from the Warren Commission that would have contradicted his hasty conclusion that Oswald had acted alone.

Hoover and Johnson were very close. Both had felt threatened by President Kennedy. Hoover knew that Kennedy was going to force him to retire as director of the FBI upon Kennedy's expected reelection to the presidency in 1964. Johnson was fearful that Kennedy was going to drop him from the ticket as his running mate in 1964. Kennedy's assassination was the solution to both men's worst fears. On May 8, 1964, a firmly ensconced President Johnson signed an Executive order waiving Hoover's mandatory retirement at age sixty-five and requested that the veteran bureaucrat continue as director of the FBI.

After the assassination both Hoover and Johnson felt threatened by John Kennedy's



ghost. Suppose there had been a conspiracy to assassinate the President? If there was, why had not Hoover, as director of the nation's principal investigative agency, not discovered it? Or if he had discovered it, which now appears to have been the case, why didn't he report it to the Secret Service and the Kennedy brothers? As for Johnson, with rumors flying around that Fidel Castro or the KGB might have been behind the crime—after all, Oswald had demonstrated for Castro in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, and had allegedly met with a KGB official in Mexico City in October, 1963—he was faced with the issue of war or peace if Oswald was found to have participated in a conspiracy to kill the President. Judging from his response to the Kennedy assassination, it appears that Lyndon Johnson was overcome by a need to quash rumors of conspiracy, *any* conspiracy. Oswald the lone-nut assassin was for Johnson the most politically convenient solution to the crime.

Both Hoover and Johnson, then, were severely threatened by the possibility that Oswald was part of a conspiracy. Their response to that threat was to prevent the nature of a possible conspiracy from becoming known. Johnson would telephone a surgeon at Parkland Hospital who was trying to save Oswald's life, telling him to obtain a

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deathbed confession from the dying accused assassin; and later he would appoint a presidential commission, to be chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren, whose members would all be men threatened, in one way or another, by the possibility of conspiracy and would therefore not care to look for one.

Still, even if we grant that Hoover and Johnson were not co-conspirators but accessories in the assassination of President Kennedy, a gnawing mystery remains in Dr. Crenshaw's Parkland Hospital scenario: Who was the armed stranger in the operating room who was prepared to take Oswald's deathbed confession, apparently at gunpoint? Was he a Secret Service agent? An FBI agent? Who sent him to Parkland Hospital? Hoover? Johnson? Someone else?

Is Dr. Charles Crenshaw's revelation of President Johnson's call to Parkland as Oswald lay dying believable? I think it is. Dr. Crenshaw, now fifty-nine, but still chairman of the Department of Surgery at John Peter Smith, the Southwestern Medical School affiliated hospital in Fort Worth, Texas, is a man of impeccable reputation. Furthermore, his co-author, Gary Shaw, is a Kennedy assassination researcher and writer, who has been investigating the case for twenty-seven years and has acquired a reputation for scrupulous research and measured judgment. I

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know Gary Shaw and I don't think he would become involved in co-authoring a book on the assassination that was not based on solid evidence and believable testimony.

But why didn't Dr. Crenshaw reveal what went on in Trauma Room 1 and the Oswald operating room of Parkland Hospital where he fought to save the lives of President Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald when the Warren Commission was investigating the assassination in 1964? Why did he keep silent all these years?

Dr. Crenshaw tells us that he kept silent to protect his medical career. Dr. Charles Baxter, director of the emergency room at Parkland, had issued an edict of secrecy just after President Kennedy was pronounced dead. No one who had attended the dying President would be permitted to talk about what he or she did or saw in Trauma Room 1. Besides, reputable physicians are not supposed to speak publicly or write about the care of their patients. If Dr. Crenshaw had dropped his bombshells on the Warren Commission in 1964, it might have resulted in his dismissal from the hospital staff, and his becoming a pariah in the medical profession. In other words, it could have ruined his medical career.

Thus did Dr. Crenshaw and the other physicians treating the wounds of John F. Ken-

nedy and Lee Harvey Oswald enter into what Dr. Crenshaw calls a "conspiracy of silence" to hide their knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the President and Oswald.

Now that conspiracy of silence has finally been broken by Dr. Crenshaw and we should be grateful to him for what he has done.

In a February 2, 1992 article on Kennedy assassination books in the *New York Times Book Review*, the author of the article, Stephen E. Ambrose, concluded that the issue of who killed President Kennedy has become "the nation's number one question about its history." Dr. Crenshaw is to be congratulated for having made his contribution to the effort to answer that momentous question.

John H. Davis,  
author of *The Kennedys: Dynasty and Disaster*  
and *Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*



# PREFACE

My name is Charles A. Crenshaw. I have been a surgeon for thirty years. Throughout my career I have watched thousands of gurneys slam through swinging doors of emergency rooms, carrying the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the broken and the dying.

Without exception, every time I have ever walked into an emergency room, I have encountered a victim of some unexpected calamity, the course of his life abruptly, sometimes permanently, interrupted. Terror, fear, remorse, shock, anger, and disbelief are but a few of the emotions that characterize trauma patients and their families. Helping these people is my business.

Trauma is ignored by most people, especially the young and rich who have no concept of life-threatening measures when they are well, when life is going their way. As the greatest killer of America's youth, trauma viciously and ruthlessly takes lives by stealth. Every day, each of us is exposed to myriad conditions that can subject us to severe injury, whether it be from an automobile accident,

a fall on the ice, an injury in a sporting event, or a knifing or shooting. Trauma is not respectful of age, race, sex, occupation, or status.

Over the years, the faces of the many victims I've treated have blended into an indistinct obscured visage of pain, fear, and death. After so many cases, all my trauma patients seem as one, except for two—John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald.

The assassination of President Kennedy, the wounding of Governor Connally, and the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald were, in medical terms, classic cases of devastating trauma, specifically, hemorrhagic shock caused by profuse bleeding. One moment, the President and Governor were riding in a motorcade through downtown Dallas on a beautiful, sunny day, waving happily to the crowd. Only minutes later, they were at Parkland Hospital, mortally wounded, fighting for their lives. It was sudden. It was unexpected. And it was life altering. As for Oswald, he believed that he was securely in the custody of the Dallas Police Department. Then, in a fraction of a second he felt a sharp pain in his abdomen, and the American people had witnessed their first-ever murder live on their television sets.

Enormous damage was done to these men by the bullets that ripped through their bodies. The entire right hemisphere of President Kennedy's brain was obliterated, almost every organ in Oswald's abdomen was ravaged, and Governor Connally almost died from the missile that traversed his chest, arm, and leg.

Trauma can attack psychologically as well as



physically. When it does, its effects can be paralyzing and long lasting. Today, families of the assassination victims, the citizens of Dallas, the medical personnel at Parkland Hospital, and those of us who remember still feel the sting and the reverberations from the hail of gunfire that lasted for only a few seconds that fall day in 1963.

Compared with other events and incidents in my life, treating the President of the United States, as he lay fatally wounded, and then operating on the man who allegedly shot him, is like matching a magnificent ocean against an insignificant pond. Never, in my wildest imagination, did I consider that as a resident surgeon at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, Texas, on that fateful November day in 1963, I would experience the most poignant moments of my entire life. Ironically, feverishly struggling to save the dim spark of life remaining in President Kennedy's dying body was only the beginning of a harrowing weekend that ultimately introduced me to a level of discretion we seldom discover, one that I have had to practice to protect my medical career, and possibly my life.

Southwestern Medical School, Parkland Hospital, and the U.S. government have never been overly subtle about their desire for us doctors to keep quiet and not divulge what we heard, saw, and felt that November weekend in 1963. From the time President Kennedy was wheeled into the emergency room, until the recent filming in Dallas of Oliver Stone's movie, *JFK*, the doctors who witnessed President Kennedy's death have always felt the necessity to continue what has evolved

over the years as a conspiracy of silence. Just recently, a gag order was issued from Southwestern Medical School warning those doctors still on staff there not to confer with Oliver Stone about President Kennedy's condition when he was brought into Parkland. Despite the fact that President Kennedy was neurologically dead when he was taken from his limousine, both Parkland Hospital and Southwestern Medical School, partners in academic medicine, will always be defensive about losing the most important patient they had ever had.

Through the years, there have been a thousand instances when I have wanted to shout to the world that the wounds to Kennedy's head and throat that I examined were caused by bullets that struck him from the front, not the back, as the public has been led to believe. Instinctively, I have reached for the telephone many times to call a television station to set the story straight when I heard someone confidently claim that Oswald was the lone gunman from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, only to restrain myself—until now.

The hundreds of similar cases involving gunshots that I have seen and treated since 1963 have further convinced me that my conclusions about President Kennedy's wounds were correct. I know trauma, especially to the head. To this day, I do not understand why the Warren Commission did not interview every doctor in President Kennedy's room. The men on that commission heard exactly what they wanted to hear, or what they were instructed to hear, and then reported what they



wanted to report, or what they were instructed to report.

Had I been allowed to testify, I would have told them that there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the bullet that killed President Kennedy was shot from the grassy knoll area. I would have also informed the Warren Commission about the call I received from Lyndon Johnson while we were operating on Lee Harvey Oswald. President Johnson told me that a man in the operating room would get a deathbed confession from Oswald. The incident confounded logic. Why the President of the United States would get personally involved in the investigation of the assassination, or why he would take the inquest out of the hands of the Texas authorities was perplexing.

Not until two years ago did I seriously consider writing a book on this subject. While I was attending an open house at a friend's home in Fort Worth, I was visiting with my friend, Jens Hansen, a writer who was completing his first book. We had previously discussed the assassination of President Kennedy and the other events of that weekend, but this discussion was more intense. We were speculating as to the long-term effects of President Kennedy's death.

I told him that I believed the Warren Report to be a fable, a virtual insult to the intelligence of the American people. Having read almost every book that had been published on Kennedy's death, in addition to having had an intense personal experience with the case, I considered myself one of only a few men who could make that claim. He asked