

New Nonfiction by M.C. Armstrong: "Murder Most Foul: The Role of Lyndon Johnson in the Murder of John F. Kennedy"



*What is the truth, and where did it go?
Ask Oswald and Ruby, they oughta know.*

*"Shut your mouth, " said the wise old owl.
Business is business, and it's a murder most foul.*

-Bob Dylan, Murder Most Foul



Doyle Whitehead flew Air Force One on November 22, 1963, the day JFK was killed in Dallas, Texas. Whitehead waited a long time before speaking up about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. He enlisted in the Air Force after graduating from Oxford High School in 1954. In 1959, after one of Dwight Eisenhower's Air Force One stewards suffered a heart attack, Whitehead subbed in and became part of the executive detail. It was while serving on Air Force One that Whitehead came to know Kennedy. Caroline, JFK's daughter, called the steward "Whitey."

"Did you know I have a steward on my plane who went to Oxford?" Whitehead remembers the president teasing on occasion.

"People celebrated on the plane ride back to Washington," Whitehead said in 2016. "They were laughing and talking about 'what we gon do now.' They were so loud we had to shut the door so Jackie wouldn't hear them."[\[i\]](#)

Only hours earlier, Johnson was being investigated for corruption by the Senate Rules Committee.[\[ii\]](#) As recently released evidence reveals, Kennedy was about to drop Johnson from the 1964 ticket.[\[iii\]](#) Thus, flying back to DC, drinking nearly a fifth of Cutty Sark whiskey on the way, LBJ had reason to celebrate. His job was secure. And as President of the United States, he now possessed control of the investigation into the murder of JFK.

The Radioactive Belief

In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Nobel Prize-winning songwriter Bob Dylan released “Murder Most Foul,” a seventeen-minute ballad about the death of President Kennedy. Many writers reported on the song’s length and surprise surge to the top of the Billboard charts. But Richard Eskow wrote, “most commentators tiptoed around the true news value: a major cultural icon has boldly given voice to a widely held but professionally radioactive belief: that John F. Kennedy was killed, not by the lone nut, Lee Harvey Oswald, but as part of a plot that was tantamount to a coup d’etat.”[\[iv\]](#) Is America finally ready to have an adult conversation about this “radioactive belief”?

It is time to reclaim the narrative of the Kennedy assassination from the propaganda machine Lyndon Johnson catalyzed when he commissioned the Warren Report, the official government version of the JFK assassination. Johnson played a hand in the murder of President Kennedy and America needs to reckon with what this means for our democracy. To be sure, we must be careful when handling the reputation of a public figure, especially one like Johnson whose presidential achievements in civil rights tie his story to so many others. But America is a deeply divided country whose democracy is in danger. The post-truth moment we find ourselves in will not go away by continuing to dance around the history of the coup in Dallas.

Dylan writes, in “Murder Most Foul,” that “We’ll mock you and shock you and put it in your face/We’ve already got someone here to take your place.”[\[v\]](#) But who was the “we” and what was Johnson’s role in the conspiracy? In November of 2022, longtime JFK assassination researcher Jefferson Morley asked on Twitter, “What’s the evidence tying LBJ to the crime or to Oswald? I don’t know of any.”[\[vi\]](#) Morley is not alone in viewing the LBJ theory as a hidden history. But there is a mountain of evidence hiding in plain sight to indict Johnson

and demonstrate that he was the mastermind of the coup.



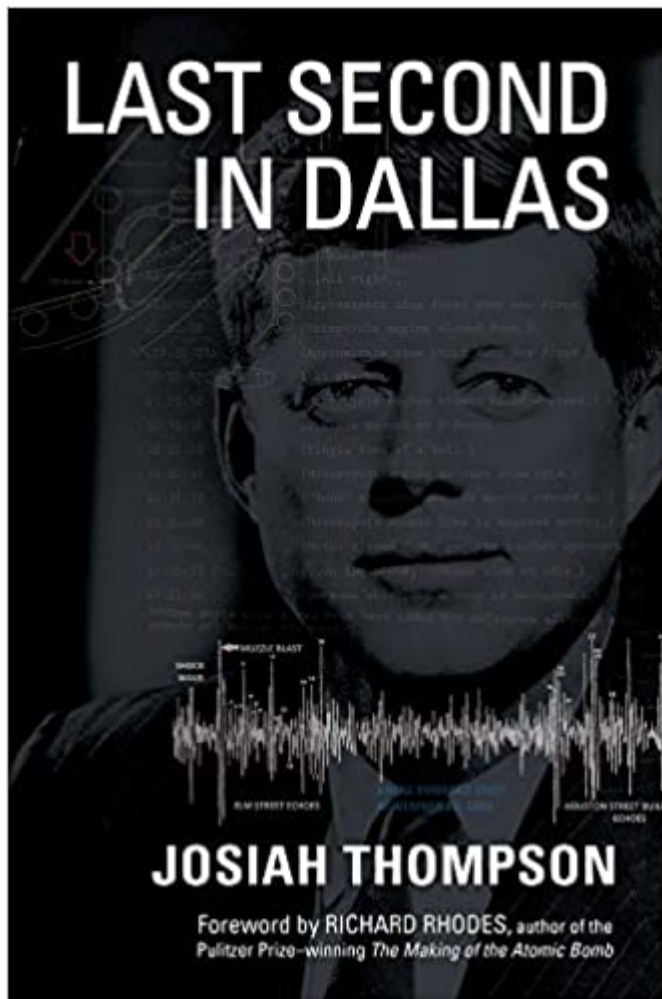
Nobody but Johnson had the means, motive and opportunity to kill Kennedy, and those who knew LBJ left behind a trail of transactions, confessions, and forensic evidence. As members of Kennedy's Secret Service acknowledged after the murder, there were multiple conspiracies to kill JFK in the fall of 1963, such as one in Chicago just a month before Dallas.[\[vii\]](#) To pull off a coordinated attack against a formidable security apparatus required a command of the police on federal, state, and local levels. The fact that the successful plot finally played out in Johnson's home state of Texas is no coincidence.

We cannot comprehend Johnson's role in the plot without understanding the network of supporters he cultivated from his earliest years as a Congressman from Texas, among these being Herman Brown, Johnson's number one source of money. Johnson's "power base," in historian Robert Caro's words, "wasn't his congressional district, it was Herman Brown's bank account . . . His power was simply the power of money."[\[viii\]](#) To understand Johnson's part in the killing of Kennedy, we must map the finances and motives of the men who depended on Johnson's access to Washington. Among these were three key figures: Herman Brown, the oilman D.H. Byrd and Ed Clark,

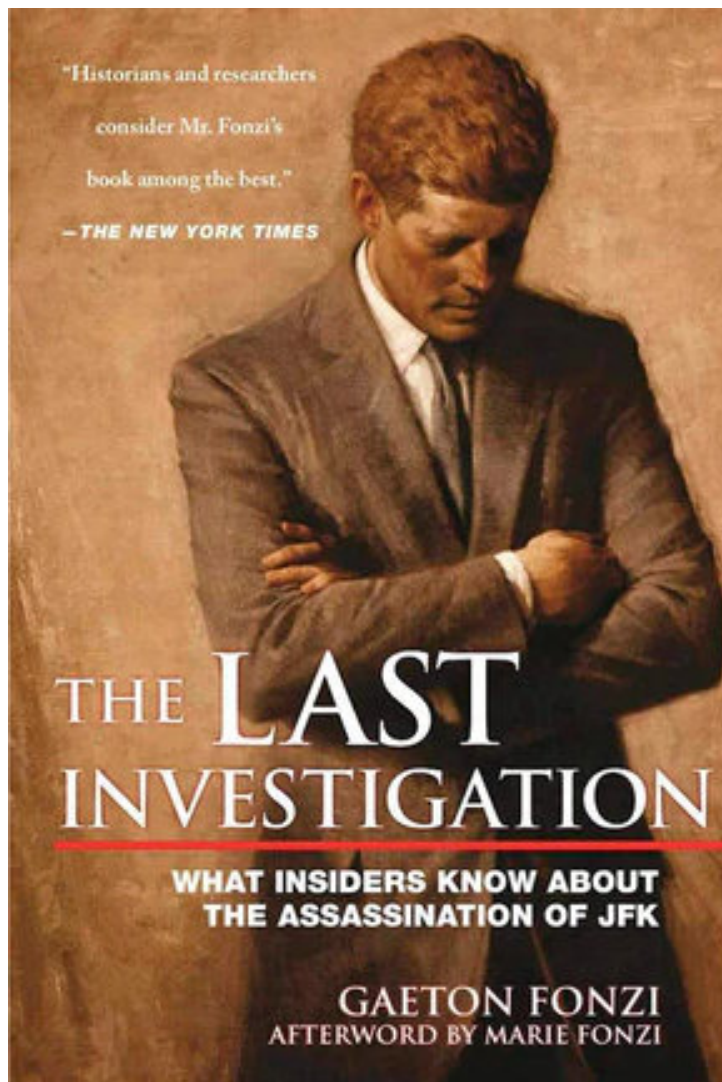
Johnson's attorney and a former lawyer for Brown and Root. The story of the Kennedy assassination is the map of Texas power. The "we" Dylan describes in his song is the bipartisan war industry that depended on Johnson for their work, both at home and abroad.

Forensic Evidence & CIA Confessions

Dylan's "we" suggests that the Warren Commission's official story of a lone nut assassin was a myth and that there was a second shooter stationed atop a slope of grass in Dealey Plaza. The songwriter sings, "Put your head out the window, let the good times roll/There's a party going on behind the grassy knoll."[\[ix\]](#) Twenty-first century scholarship supports Dylan, revealing that the decisive headshot from frame 313 of the Zapruder film was, in fact, from an angle consistent with the location of the grassy knoll. In a 2001 issue of *Science and Justice*, a quarterly from Britain's Forensic Science Society, a government researcher named D.B. Thomas claimed that there was more than a ninety-six percent certainty that the infamous headshot came from the front right of JFK's limousine and, more specifically, from the grassy knoll, not the Texas School Book Depository.[\[x\]](#) Thomas' article, supported by Josiah Thompson's 2021 study, *Last Second in Dallas*, refutes the Warren Commission's 1964 "lone nut" theory and affirms the findings of the 1978 House Select Committee on Assassinations who argued the president's murder was most likely the "result of a conspiracy."[\[xi\]](#)



The power of *Last Second in Dallas* is a function of Thompson's methodology "that ignores the sexy and elusive" question of "whodunnit?"[\[xii\]](#) Like the scholarship of D.B. Thomas, Thompson takes us back to the fundamental questions of forensic data such as "Were there multiple shooters?" and "Where did the shots come from?" By focusing rigorously on the forensic analysis, Thompson creates a firm foundation for investigators to now concern themselves with the question of culpability. The answer, in line with the work of researchers like James W. Douglass, Gaeton Fonzi, Oliver Stone, and David Talbot is that the CIA, using Cuban and mafia assets, murdered JFK, with Allen Dulles playing a key hand.



But we must now go one step further and share the big open secret in Texas: Lyndon Johnson sat at the top of the plot's chain of command. Johnson, Kennedy's Vice-President, ordered the hit and, through his attorney, Ed Clark, played a decisive role in the orchestration of both the assassination and the cover-up.

**"Neither le Carré nor Graham Greene could do any better."
— *Daily Beast***

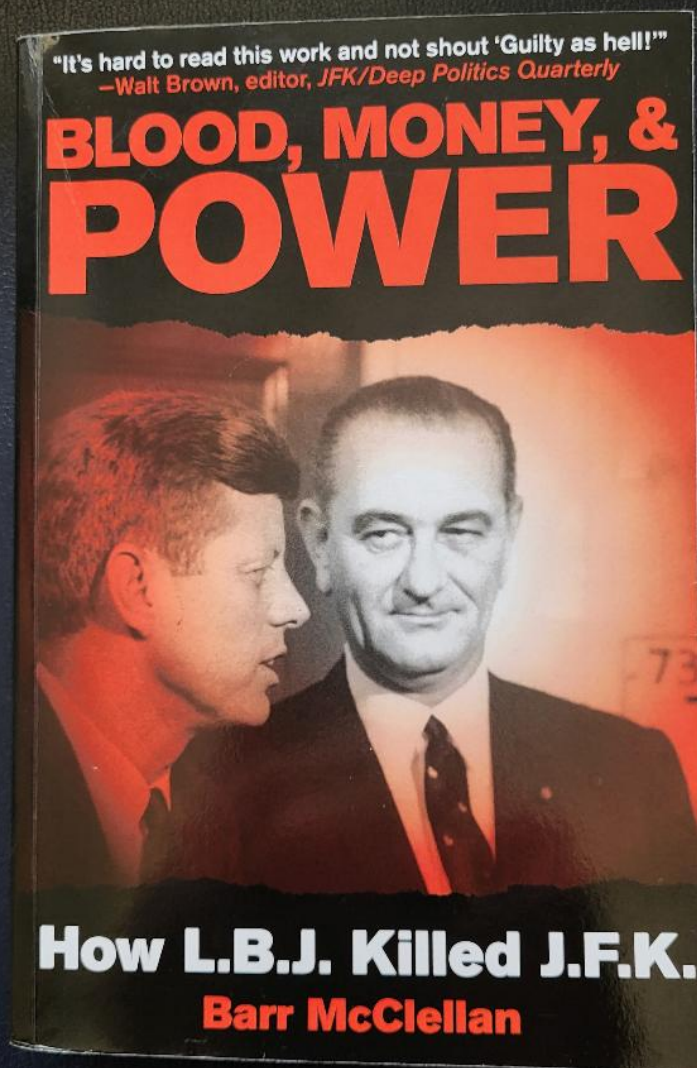
The Devil's Chessboard

**Allen Dulles,
the CIA,
and the
Rise of
America's
Secret
Government**

David Talbot
New York Times Bestseller

To prove this point, we must step behind the curtain of attorney-client privilege. Barr McClellan, who was the father of Scott McClellan, the press secretary for George W. Bush, was employed by the Johnson administration (National Labor Relations Board and Federal Power Commission) and served as a Johnson attorney from 1966 through 1971, working under Ed Clark and Don Thomas at Clark, Thomas and Winters. For decades, McClellan maintained a silence consistent with the code of confidentiality that attends lawyer-client relations.

However, like Whitehead, McClellan felt an obligation to tell the truth before it was too late. In 2003, forty years after the murder of the President, McClellan wrote *Blood, Money, & Power: How LBJ Killed JFK*. What McClellan's book reveals is a man who was an eyewitness to history and intimately understood why Johnson had Kennedy murdered: to end a government investigation into Johnson's corruption. In 1973, the same year LBJ died, Don Thomas confessed to McClellan the firm's role in the assassination and that Ed Clark was the figure who planned the hit. McClellan writes, "Edward A. Clark, attorney at law, Johnson's right-hand man and the only man he trusted, was the key man in the scheme that culminated in Dallas on November 22, 1963."[\[xiii\]](#) McClellan's book investigates Johnson's hand in the assassination, Johnson's theft of the 1948 Senatorial race (Don Thomas stuffed the ballot box in Precinct 13), and also explores LBJ's relationship with Malcolm "Mac" Wallace, whom McClellan claims was responsible, at Johnson's behest, for the 1961 murder of government investigator Henry Marshall. McClellan writes that Johnson was a "psychopath" and capable of murder and that the Wallace case offers precedent for the murder of JFK.[\[xiv\]](#) Recent scholarship from Jeremy Kuzmarov supports the claim that Johnson had plotted other murders before Kennedy's. McClellan, in his book and Kuzmarov in his article, "Was LBJ A Serial Killer Who Advanced His Career by Murdering 6 Other Men Who Stood in His Way?", both reveal a nexus of Texas corruption ("Bubba justice") that resonates with this student of the Iraq war under Bush and Cheney.[\[xv\]](#) But before the Kellogg, Brown, and Root that regulated the burn pits of the Global War on Terror, there was the Brown and Root that served Lyndon Johnson and his corporate partners in Vietnam.



McClellan points readers toward a “money trail” that shows contracts at risk before November 22, 1963, and contracts secured after the assassination. On January 17, 1963, John F. Kennedy proposed the repeal of the famous “oil depletion allowance,” a revision to the tax code that would have cost Texas oilmen up to \$300 million a year.[\[xvii\]](#) In addition to documenting these provocatively progressive policies from Kennedy, McClellan goes beyond circumstantial evidence and delivers forensic data that places the fingerprint of Wallace, Johnson’s henchman, on the sixth floor of the Texas School

Book Depository on the day of Kennedy's murder. Furthermore, the Wallace print has now traveled through a blind submission peer-review process and has been confirmed by two independent researchers, including Interpol print examiners in Paris, France.[\[xvii\]](#)

The Wallace print is significant and so is the precedent of the Marshall case. In 1961, Henry Marshall was himself investigating Johnson and another LBJ aide, Billy Sol Estes. Wallace, implicated in Marshall's murder, was spotted at the Texas School Depository on November 22, 1963, by a Chickasaw Indian named Loy Factor who claimed that he himself—Factor—was part of the kill team. Factor's statement and Wallace's fingerprint in "the sniper's nest," places Johnson's key fixer at the scene of the crime. But Whitehead and McClellan's disclosures, Factor's eyewitness account, and Wallace's fingerprint (available for viewing in the National Archive) do not close the case of the Kennedy assassination. No single data point does. As Jim Marrs, the author of *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy*, writes, "when it comes to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, don't trust any one source."[\[xviii\]](#) Let it be clear: McClellan is not the only witness indicting Johnson. So let the story now turn to corroboration from participants in the coup: E. Howard Hunt and David Morales.

Famous for his role in the Watergate break-in, Hunt was also a novelist and screenwriter, as well as a friend of former CIA Director, Allen Dulles. Hunt, who died on January 23, 2007, admitted to being a "benchwarmer" on the CIA team that murdered JFK.[\[xix\]](#) Hunt's testimony, published on the pages of *Rolling Stone* and *Wired* in 2007, can also be located in his son Saint John's 2008 memoir, *Bond of Secrecy*.[\[xx\]](#) In the map of the hit that he provided to Saint John, Hunt places the name "LBJ" at the top of "the chain of command." Beneath LBJ is a CIA agent named "Cord Meyer," a man whose estranged wife, Mary, was a mistress of JFK and was herself murdered less than

a year after the president. In addition to this “chain of command” map, Hunt provides a timeline for a plot that begins in 1962 and includes the names of CIA agents Marita Lorenz, David Atlee Phillips, and David Morales. Lorenz, Phillips, and Morales, separately, claimed Kennedy’s death was a CIA hit, but Morales went further, arguing, like Hunt, that Johnson approved the plot.[\[xxi\]](#)[\[xxii\]](#) Even more than this, “According to his lawyer, Robert Walton, Morales revealed that he [Morales] was involved in *both* Kennedy assassinations.”[\[xxiii\]](#) Yes, Morales’ and Hunt’s story point straight at the man McClellan accused and the same man Whitehead heard laughing and celebrating on November 22, 1963: Lyndon Johnson.

“Business is business”: The Money Trail

Clare Boothe Luce, former Congresswoman and the wife of Henry Luce, the media magnate who founded *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune* and countless other mainstream media publications, knew a thing or two about power and propaganda. On the way to JFK’s inaugural ball in 1961, Luce asked the new Vice-President, Lyndon Johnson, if he minded being relegated to the number two spot. She asked Johnson to “come clean.”

“Clare,” Johnson replied, “I looked it up. One out of every four presidents has died in office. I’m a gamblin’ man, darlin’, and this is the only chance I’ve got.”[\[xxiv\]](#)

If Johnson rolled the dice and was indeed the figure at the top of the chain of command for the assassination of JFK, why should we care, now that both men are dead? Sixty years later, what does this story tell us about contemporary America where this is still so much talk of coups, corruption, and treason? In order to comprehend government corruption we have to understand how corporate power captures government agencies and assets. We cannot fully fathom the means and motives of Johnson without understanding America’s permanent war party, the ongoing bipartisan social network of politicians and their clients in the military-industrial community. In order to

contextualize the killing of Kennedy, we have to study the city and state of “The Big Event,” as the CIA called the assassination.[\[xxv\]](#) If Johnson ordered “The Big Event,” and Clark and the CIA orchestrated the logistics and Brown was one of Johnson’s primary financial backers, who in Dallas facilitated the placement of Lee Harvey Oswald in the Texas School Book Depository?

In 2021, the year after Dylan released “Murder Most Foul” and the same year Thompson published *Last Second in Dallas*, the historian H.P. Albarelli published a posthumous book called *Coup in Dallas*. Based on the 1963 datebook of CIA operative, Jean Pierre Lafitte, *Coup in Dallas* offers readers a primary document that maps the cast behind “The Big Event.” On November 23, 1963, Lafitte writes, “Rene says, ‘Coup de grace.’[\[xxvi\]](#) “Rene” was the name of Lafitte’s wife, the woman who gave Albarelli the datebook. Rene Lafitte once remarked, “Dallas, ah goodness, I’m not sure what to say . . . I wasn’t there anywhere near as often as Pierre . . . not at all. But Pierre would say it was . . . Dallas was like the arms and legs of the American secret service, your CIA.”[\[xxvii\]](#) Albarelli’s book shines a light on the major players in the coup and pays particular close attention to Johnson’s friend, D.H. Byrd.



Other than C.I.A allegations, eyewitness accounts, and the fingerprint of Mac Wallace, how else do we answer Jefferson Morley's question and connect Oswald to Johnson? The answer is David Harold "Dry Hole" Byrd, the military subcontractor, Texas oilman, and founder of the Civil Air Patrol, to which Oswald belonged as a teenager. Incidentally, Byrd also owned the building that contained the Texas School Book Depository where Oswald was employed on the day of the assassination. Byrd was a crony of Johnson and once said, "Sam Rayburn, Morrie Shepard, John Connally, and Lyndon Johnson on the national scene were to become men I could go to anytime that I wanted action, and so were a succession of Texas governors." [\[xxviii\]](#) Like Brown, Byrd knew Johnson personally, stood to profit greatly from a Johnson presidency, and, likewise, stood to absorb substantial losses if the oil depletion allowance was allowed to expire or if Johnson went to prison. We may never know for sure whether Oswald was a whistleblower, CIA double-agent, or "patsy" (as he claimed on TV), but what is now irrefutable is the fact that there were multiple shooters and that on November 22, 1963, Oswald was working in the building Byrd had purchased just the year

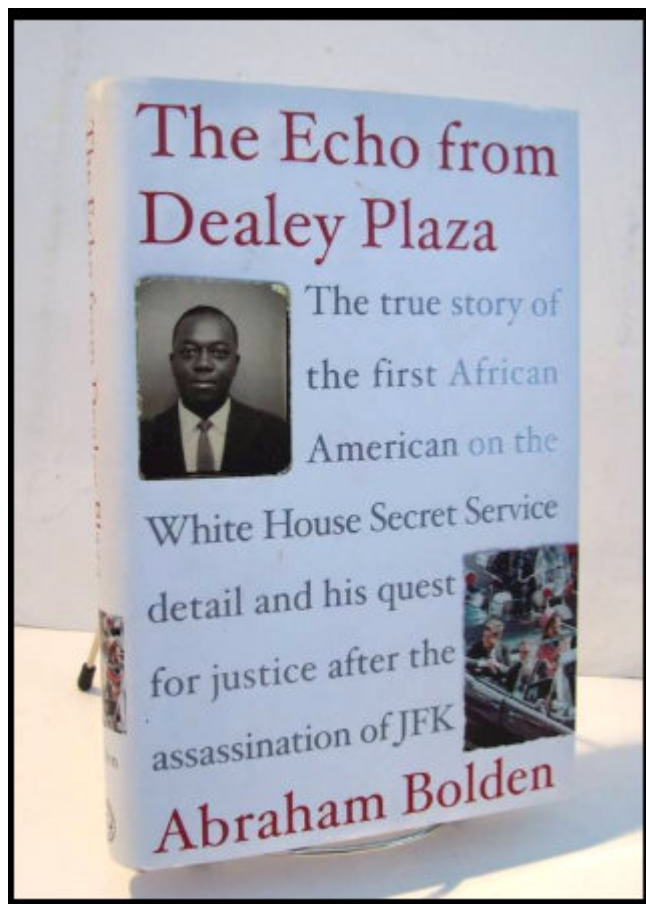
before and where a fingerprint of Johnson's fixer, Mac Wallace, was discovered by police.[\[xxix\]](#)

McClellan, Byrd, Clark, Hunt, Factor, Wallace, and Morales all tie Johnson to Kennedy's killing. McClellan claimed that Johnson's attorney, Ed Clark, was horrified when Oswald wasn't murdered after the assassination but was instead arrested and allowed to speak on TV and declare he—Oswald—was a "patsy."[\[xxx\]](#) McClellan provided his colleague's confession and Wallace's fingerprint as evidence to connect Johnson to the crime of the century, but also insisted that researchers follow the money trail of Johnson's social network in order to witness foreknowledge of the plot. Nowhere is the advance intelligence more apparent than in the pre-assassination stock trades of Byrd and his associate at Ling-TEMCO-Vought (LTV), James Ling, former employer of Mac Wallace. LTV, perhaps the inspiration for "Vought International" from the Dynamite Comic series, was one of the largest engineering and manufacturing conglomerates in the United States in 1963. Like with Brown and Root, the profits of Vought went through the roof in the years after JFK's murder. Right before the assassination, Ling and Byrd, through an investment vehicle called the Alpha-Omega Corporation, "purchased 132,600 shares of LTV stocks for around \$2 million."[\[xxxii\]](#) LTV was responsible for developing a number of planes and weapons that were used during the Vietnam War. According to Albarelli, the "\$2 million investment by Byrd/Ling was worth \$26 million by 1967."[\[xxxiii\]](#) As Johnson reversed the Kennedy policy of withdrawal from Vietnam and the war progressed, LTV "would consistently be among the top-ten aerospace companies in dollar volume of prime contracts."[\[xxxiii\]](#) Which is to say, Byrd got rich off the coup in Dallas, and so did Clark and Brown of Brown and Root, later renamed KBR. Lyndon Johnson was the savior of the military-industrial complex. So much depended on that day in Dallas.

"Lyndon Johnson Did It"

Critics might reasonably ask, “Where are the stories of the marginalized?” in the history of the Kennedy assassination? How do we summon the voices of the millions dead in Vietnam? We can’t possibly tell the tales of all the people around the world who were impacted by Kennedy’s murder. But perhaps some small measure of justice can be achieved by listening to four American citizens whose stories have been muted by the media. So, let us turn here in the end to Abraham Bolden, Evelyn Lincoln, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Dorothy Kilgallen.

On April 26, 2022, President Biden pardoned Bolden, a man JFK called “the Jackie Robinson of the Secret Service,” which is to say the first Black Secret Service agent to serve on White House detail. Bolden was hired by Kennedy and then later challenged Johnson and the Warren Commission with Secret Service evidence of conspiracies to kill Kennedy prior to the release of the Warren Report.[\[xxxiv\]](#) Was Bolden rewarded for his bravery? No. Like so many who came after him, Bolden was attacked for telling the truth and on May 18, 1964, Bolden was thrown in prison for bribery, conspiracy, and obstruction of justice.



Bolden committed a narrative violation. Decades before Snowden, Assange, Hale and Manning, Bolden blew the whistle on the military-industrial complex. He told the truth. For sixty years, Bolden claimed he had been framed by the very government he took an oath to serve. He has stated to this writer and others that he heard Johnson threaten both Kennedy brothers while serving in the White House.[\[xxxv\]](#) In the twenty-first century, Bolden has been forceful about his analysis of the killing: "[T]he assassination of the president went to the highest position of government," he said in a 2018 interview. "There was a coup to take him [Kennedy] out of power."[\[xxxvi\]](#) Like "many in the DFS" (Mexican CIA), Bolden's investigation of the murder points to "the highest position in government."[\[xxxvii\]](#) But for a long time, Bolden, author of *The Echo from Dealey Plaza*, has been ignored by America's mainstream media. Fortunately, with the help of journalists, President Biden heard Bolden's story before it was too late. In January of 2022, Mary Mitchell, writing in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, published an editorial in which she wrote, "While

Bolden's life story might seem like a conspiracy theory to some, Black Americans will identify with the brand of injustice that buries its victims under false accusations and legal documents." [\[xxxviii\]](#) Mitchell's voice, amplifying Bolden's, was legitimated by Biden, the man who now keeps a bust of Robert F. Kennedy in the Oval Office and is currently being challenged by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. for the 2024 Democratic nomination.



Perhaps part of RFK Jr.'s challenge to Biden has something to do with Biden's refusal to go all the way in the story of Kennedy's uncle. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., whose career and campaign platform focuses on government corruption and agency capture, may be the only American capable of compelling Biden to open the assassination archives. Certainly, others are trying. In October of 2022, The Mary Ferrell Foundation sued the Biden administration for once again postponing the release of the JFK files. [\[xxxix\]](#) In December of 2022, the Biden administration ordered the release of more than 13,000 records, but caved to the CIA's appeal to maintain the redaction of more than 4,000 others. [\[xl\]](#) Why does the censorship persist? Is this just institutional protection or is something else at play? And beyond the redaction and withholding of documents, why does the American media refuse to listen to the people closest to this case? What did Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's secretary and a passenger in the motorcade, say at the time of the assassination and how did Jackie

Kennedy, covered in the blood of her dead husband, view the crime she witnessed?

Lincoln, who was fifty-four on the day of the murder, visited JFK's grave every year on November 22nd. On the plane ride back from Dallas, the same flight where Whitehead overheard Johnson celebrating, Lincoln wrote down a list of suspects. At the top of her list was the same name at the top of Hunt's deathbed chain of command: "Lyndon." [\[xli\]](#) Was Lincoln the only one on Air Force One who felt she was travelling with the architect of a coup?

No.

Jackie Kennedy knew what many in DC knew about her husband's relationship with both LBJ and Allen Dulles. She knew that her husband loathed the Vice-President and that the ex-head of the CIA resented her husband after JFK fired Dulles subsequent to the disastrous failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Did Jackie see the pictures in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 15th, 1963, three months before her husband's murder, revealing Dulles meeting with LBJ at the Vice-President's ranch? Did she ever come to find out that Dulles, who kept a meticulous datebook, left that particular encounter with LBJ off the record? [\[xlii\]](#) We may never know the answer to these questions, but we do know that on November 22, 1963, Jackie Kennedy was an eyewitness to a crime that traumatized her, her family, her nation, and countless others beyond America's borders. We also know that Jackie, like her brother-in-law, Robert F. Kennedy, suspected a conspiracy from the very beginning.

RFK once famously said, "If the American people knew the truth about Dallas, there would be blood in the streets." [\[xliii\]](#) Jackie Kennedy knew there was a conspiracy. She was caught in the crossfire. Hours after the assassination, while aboard Air Force One with Whitehead and Johnson, she considered her grisly appearance. "My whole face was splattered with blood and hair. I wiped it off with a Kleenex," she said. But then,

“one second later I thought why did I wash the blood off? I should have left it there, let them see what they’ve done.”[\[xliv\]](#) Jackie knew from the start that her husband’s murder was the work of more than one lone communist nut bar. Her pronoun was “they.”

But Jackie went further.

According to Whitehead, after the assassination Johnson and his cronies were laughing and celebrating within earshot of the widow and were so out of hand that Whitehead had to hide Jackie away. Perhaps keeping this woman in the dark seemed an act of mercy in the moment, a gesture of compassion on behalf of “Whitey.” But the truth has a way of getting through those doors men close to protect women. No one was closer to the crime of the century than Jackie Kennedy. No one had a better seat for what Dylan called “the greatest magic trick ever under the sun.”[\[xlv\]](#) In the singer Eddie Fisher’s memoir, *Been There, Done That*, Fisher describes his relationship with Pamela Turnure, the press secretary for Jackie Kennedy at the time of the assassination. “On the flight back,” Fisher writes, “Pam told me, Jackie told her, ‘Lyndon Johnson did it.’ Words I’ll never forget.”[\[xlvi\]](#) Those words, like Bolden’s, Factor’s, Hunt’s, Lincoln’s, McClellan’s, Morales’, Whitehead’s and so many others, cannot stand alone. In this essay, however, they find accord. In closing, they stand here with the voices of Dorothy Kilgallen and Jack Ruby.

In “Murder Most Foul,” Dylan sings, “What is the truth and where did it go? Ask Oswald and Ruby, they oughta know.”[\[xlvii\]](#) Dorothy Kilgallen did ask Jack Ruby, the man who murdered Oswald on national television. Who was this fearless journalist who dared to question her government’s official narrative? According to Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Kilgallen was “the greatest female writer in the world.”[\[xlviii\]](#) Kilgallen, in the final years of her short life, worked as a crime reporter and was about to publish a book about the Kennedy killing. But Kilgallen died on November 8, 1965, just

before she could deliver the pages of *Murder One* to her publisher at Random House, Bennet Cerf.[\[xlix\]](#) However, history has documented that Kilgallen's quest for the truth was focused on Ruby. Kilgallen attended the Ruby trial and was the only journalist granted a private interview.



Dorothy Kilgallen, journalist

In February of 1964, Kilgallen wrote, "It appears Washington knows or suspects something about Lee Harvey Oswald that it does not want Dallas and the rest of the world to know or suspect." Kilgallen told her closest friends that her Ruby disclosures would "blow the JFK case sky high."[\[l\]](#) But then, at the age of fifty-two, Kilgallen died of an "accidental overdose" of alcohol and barbiturates. Was she murdered because she knew too much? We may never know. But what the historical record can provide, even though her book and notes have disappeared, is the voice of Jack Ruby, the key to the Kennedy assassination, according to Kilgallen.

In a letter he sent to a friend while in jail, Ruby wrote: "I

am counting on you to save this country a lot of bloodshed. As soon as you get out you must read *A Texan Looks at Lyndon* (reference to a book called *A Texan Looks at Lyndon* by J. Everett Haley), and it may open your eyes to a lot of things. This man is a Nazi in the worst order.”[\[li\]](#) Yes, Jack Ruby knew that Johnson was corrupt and part of the plot. Ruby shot Oswald to protect the cover story. Jack Ruby didn’t kill Lee Harvey Oswald out of love for JFK and he certainly didn’t do it out of love for the man he calls “a Nazi.” This pattern of focusing on LBJ can be further located in Ruby’s testimony to the Warren Commission and the videos of his brief exchanges with reporters.

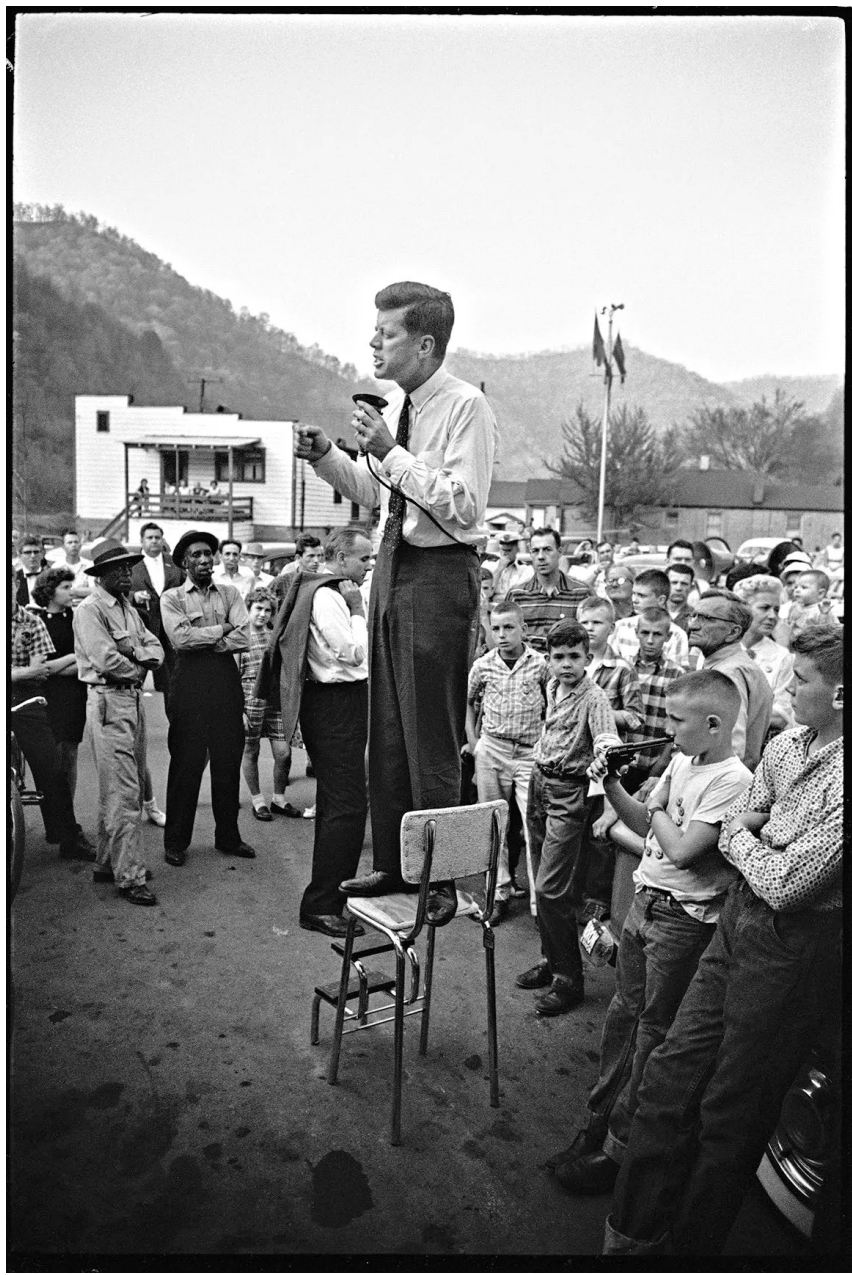
“I wish that our beloved President Lyndon Johnson would have delved deeper into the situation,” Ruby said to the Warren Commission, but the Commission never granted Ruby his request to leave Texas and travel to DC where he felt he could tell the truth.[\[lii\]](#) So Ruby continued to hammer on the president in later interviews.

“The people that have had so much to gain and had such an ulterior motive for putting me in the position I’m in will never let the true facts come above board to the world,”[\[liii\]](#) Ruby said. When asked by a reporter to elaborate, Ruby who was himself about to die in 1967 (right after winning an appeal for a new trial), said, “I want to correct what I said before about the Vice-President.” He then continued. “When I mentioned about Adlai Stevenson, if he were Vice-President, there would have never been an assassination of our beloved President Kennedy.” The reporter asked Ruby to “explain again.”

“Well,” Ruby said. “The answer is the man in office right now.”[\[liv\]](#)

“[T]he man in office right now,” in 1965 when the interview with Jack Ruby took place, was Lyndon Johnson, the architect of the Vietnam War and the man Ruby characterized as a Nazi.

Ruby's response here gives the reader a sense of why Kilgallen was so excited about publishing her book, *Murder One*. Kilgallen's voice, however, was never heard. Like Ruby and so many witnesses in this case, Kilgallen died a premature death. But here, alongside Jackie Kennedy and Evelyn Lincoln, we can see that the women closest to this case all came to the same conclusion. Cumulatively, as a people's history, the story these women tell aligns with the arguments of JFK's Secret Service, LBJ's attorneys, and the CIA agents who were part of the hit team. Their voices, revealed as Bob Dylan's chorus in this space, support contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship and its thesis of conspiracy. John F. Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States, was murdered by his successor, Lyndon Johnson, in a coup d'état, an act where the means and motive were one and the same: power.





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For More Information

M.C. Armstrong, "Josiah Thompson's 'Last Second in Dallas':
<https://brooklynrail.org/2021/04/books/Josiah-Thompsons-Last-Second-in-Dallas>

Patrick Bet-David, Interviewing David Bolden:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHEX8DZQ160>

Nigel Turner: "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" (originally aired on The History Channel):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSLWsoj0L4A>

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New Nonfiction from Larry Abbott: Review of Joy Damiani's "If You Ain't Cheatin', You Ain't Tryin'"



JOY DAMIANI

**IF YOU AIN'T
CHEATIN'.
YOU AIN'T
TRYIN'**

**and other lessons
I learned in the Army**

Joy Damiani: *If You Ain't Cheatin', You Ain't Tryin' (and other lessons I learned in the Army)*

[Available on Amazon in Kindle and paperback versions](#)

You will hate this book. You will hate being compelled to finish Damiani's story in one sitting (you're excused if it takes two). You will hate spewing coffee (or other beverage) onto your computer keys if you are reading the book on Kindle, or sopping a few pages of the paperback, because of Damiani's humor and sarcasm. And you will hate that the story she tells is, regrettably, true, not only about her personal experiences but also about her analysis of military culture in general and the Iraq War.

Formerly known as Emily Yates, the author now goes by Joy (her middle name) Damiani (her family name). She "traded in" her "old name" to put closure on her divorce and to move ahead with new projects. As a musician and songwriter she has released a number of albums and music videos; a recent music video, a lively romp, is entitled "Brains in Meat Suits." She is also a poet. "I Am the Savage" relates to her time in Iraq, while "Yellow Ribbon" criticizes the empty patriotism of civilians who feel that a yellow ribbon on their car absolves them of complicity in war. Damiani has published essays on veterans' issues, especially the difficulties faced by women vets returning home.

She now turns to memoir. *If You Ain't Cheatin', You Ain't Tryin'* (Joy Damiani Words & Music, 2022), "Dedicated to every veteran who has lived these lessons and to every young person who learns them for the first time here," is divided into thirteen chapters that describe Damiani's teenage pre-military years, the reasons she joined the Army at age 19, her six years in the military, with two Iraq deployments writing "Army news" as a Public Affairs Specialist, and concluding chapters that assesses her experiences and offers a bit on her immediate post-deployment life.

The book begins with a brief mention of 9/11 and then a flashforward to 2004, where Damiani, as a nineteen-year old Public Affairs Specialist, has to revise the post newspaper to include a KIA report and a photograph. She “mechanically considered” the change, “calculating the dead in terms of column inches.” Then she learns that the KIA was actually a friend, Tuazon; he had only been in Iraq for two months. She had learned to separate herself from any emotions about her stories, especially about those killed, but she realizes her well-crafted professionalism is starting to crack when she thinks of all the dead and that she is just repeating a script: “A wave of nausea washes over my body . . . I was so proud of my well-rehearsed presentation—showing no sorrow, always professional! But now I seem to be playing the part without trying.” She smooths over the crack with Jim Beam.

Damiani’s journey to the Army is somewhat circuitous. Her sarcastic bent and dislike of authority lead her parents to more or less spirit her away to the Family Foundation School in order to cure her of her sins of sarcasm and rebellion. (The Family Foundation School, in Hancock, New York, closed in 2014 amid lawsuits and accusations of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse of its teenage students). In the eighteen months plus she spends at the school the only bright spot is a class in folk music, where she develops an “affinity” for Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Kris Kristofferson, among others, and writers Jack Kerouac and Hunter S. Thompson. Sure cures for rebellion! Unfortunately, Damiani is not suitably cured of her sarcasm, and she faces another six months of “supervised rock-picking.” Eventually, she decides to leave the school and hitchhikes back home to Syracuse, where her parents put her on a strict regimen in order to live at home. She also enrolls in a local community college and after six months back home gets a call from an Army recruiter, offering her, for a five-year hitch, a journalism, or “Public Affairs Specialist,” opportunity. It takes Damiani all of twelve seconds to answer in the affirmative.

She goes to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for basic training. She stumbles through, with sprains, blisters, a broken nose, and two black eyes, but compared to her time at the Family Foundation School she writes that, "the Army's attempts at indoctrination seem almost quaint." Her rebellious tendencies are still in evidence: She does qualify in marksmanship but names her M16 A-2 rifle "Bungalow Bill" after the Beatles' song. She also pokes her finger in the eye of the Army in other ways: "The drill sergeants ignore me when I hum 'The Times, They Are A-Changin'' while on guard duty, or when I use my turn calling marching cadences to lead the platoon in a rousing chorus of 'War! What is it good for?'"

The next chapters detail Damiani's first deployment to Kuwait for training and then to Iraq. When she finally reaches Baghdad her job "is to put out a decent newspaper . . . I've come to take it seriously." Although she is still a rhombic peg in a triangular hole she does have the commitment to do her best; "the option of apathy has never even been on the table before." She has integrity about her work even as she remains cynical about the "big picture." At the same time her dream of being a real "war reporter" is evaporating: "Now, I feel defeated, rotting away in a combat-zone cubicle, waiting-wishing-for one of those incessant mortar attacks to successfully explode the headquarters." After her complaints, bordering on insubordination, Damiani does get the opportunity to go out on joint U.S. and Iraqi patrols. Unfortunately, that assignment is short-lived. Because of her criticism of an incompetent co-worker on the journalism team, she is removed from her associate editor position and basically has to cut and paste articles from Google searches. She still has seven months to go.

After a year in Iraq Damiani's cynical side begins to emerge more and more. She writes: "I've already spent the better (or worse) part of twelve months in Iraq as part of what I have come to recognize as an illegally-invading force." She notes

that Orwellian language needs to be used to present everything in a positive light. “‘Interrogation’ becomes ‘intelligence-gathering’”; the “occupation” is “‘reconstruction’”; the “war” is a “‘peace-keeping mission’”; “suicides” become “‘non-combat-related deaths.’” She feels herself to be a “foreign invader.”

Interspersed with her time in Iraq, Damiani uses flashbacks to chronicle her disastrous marriage. She was married a few months before deployment and right before her return to the States after a year in Iraq she realizes that the relationship had devolved further, that she has become “expendable.” As she sits alone in her trailer at Camp Liberty she reaches her nadir, writing that she “eyed my assault rifle and let my mind wander . . . absentmindedly measuring the distance from the trigger to the barrel, the distance from my fingers to my head.” Damiani does return home and the marriage hits bottom, involving her arrest for domestic violence and a stay in a psychiatric hospital after suicide threats. She is released after seventy-two hours and returns to work at [what base?]: “The information war must go on. The war inside my head will have to wait.” Her resentment over assignments grows: “I’ve come to accept that by the time a typical day is over, I will want to cut someone open and feed them their own intestines. I see this as a step forward in my quest for self-realization and inner peace.”

When there appears to be light at the end of the military tunnel the threat of stop-loss is the oncoming train, to paraphrase poet Robert Lowell. Damiani believes that she will be out before stop-loss takes effect, and if she re-enlists she can choose her duty, but the Army comes up with a creative way to hold on to her. They devise an Orwellian “do-not-retain,” but still deployable list, albeit a falsehood, which is a method to guarantee her second deployment to Iraq. Damiani agrees (without really agreeing) to return, and it is worth a look at her reason: “The thought crosses my mind that

I would feel like a jackass if I tried to get out of the Army on time while everyone around me shipped out. Even if it was an option, could I bring myself to be that soldier? I'm not deploying because I want to, or because I think it's a good idea. I'm doing it because deep down, I believe that if I don't do it—if I get out of it on a technicality—I will be making light of everyone else's sacrifice. I'll be saying that I am special, that I deserve to stay home when my fellow soldiers pack up and go to war, and that the contract I signed is negotiable . . . Without realizing it, despite every effort to resist the Army's conditioning and retain control of at least my own mind, I have suddenly become the kind of soldier the Army has always wanted: even when given the choice, I can't quit the team."

She returns to Iraq for fifteen months, and the Public Affairs duties are not much better. Damiani's major project is photographing visiting morale-boosting cheerleaders. She also details the secretive drinking and an attempted sexual assault by two soldiers she thought were friends. Faced with an extended deployment, she decides on the (not so) subtle course of annoying her superiors ("Intimately aware of the drastic repercussions for out-and-out revolt, I've swiveled my sights in the familiar direction of subtle rebellion. The delicate dance of expressing my displeasure while also staying out of trouble requires more finesse than I usually can claim").

This entails including quotes from Hunter S. Thompson and lyrics from Bob Dylan in official emails, to the consternation of a major and a colonel, and creating a custom-made ID badge with a decidedly unserious face.

As the memoir winds down, Damiani becomes more critical and somber about the whole enterprise, seeing failure everywhere. She writes: "As far as I can tell, five years after the 'surgical' airstrikes flashily-nicknamed 'Shock and Awe' leveled the nation's cities, government, and infrastructure, our presence in Iraq is a clear indicator that if an exit

strategy ever existed here, it has to have gone horribly awry. Either that, or—I shudder at the thought that I don't want to believe—this whole debacle could be intentional.” As a kind of bookend to the death of Tuazon mentioned at the beginning of the book, she learns of the death of a friend from her first deployment, Mele, killed by an IED. Choking back tears she is left with one thought: *“What is the fucking point of this? What. Is. The fucking. Point? Nobody is winning here.”*

The book closes in 2011, three years after Damiani's return to the States. She is twenty-nine years old. She spends some of her GI Bill at Cal Berkeley, where one of her courses includes study of the Iraq War. Her fellow students are ten years younger. To them, the war is an object of study; to her, it is still “present tense.” She writes: “My friends are still fighting it, after all. Sometimes I wonder if I am, too.” She begins to second-guess herself with “what ifs?” and “maybes.” But after all is said and done, she ends with the recognition that “The Army didn't make me blind. My sight is the clearest it's ever been.”

Although she might protest my estimation, Damiani is the type of soldier the Army *needs*. She refused to take the easy way out, to fall victim to simply “playing the game” to make her time more agreeable. Even with the disappointments, the misery, the betrayals, and the lies that she endures, sometimes with humor, sometimes with rancor, she retains the integrity of her commitment.

For further reading:

“Joy Damiani, Writer, Podcaster, Musician, and Army Veteran,” Interview with Frank Morano, <https://wabcradio.com/episode/joy-damiani-writer-podcaster-musician-and-army-veteran-11-11-2022/>

A selection of music videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/c/JoyDamiani>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/joydamianmusic/>

<https://www.wrath-bearingtree.com/2020/09/artist-profile-music-ian-emily-yates/>