



WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES

SESSION 2B

ROUTES TO THE PAST

**Authentic? History, Heritage and Matters of
Veracity and Experience**

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URBAN PLANNING AFTER JFK: RE-PLANNING THE “CITY OF HATE”

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Following the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in November 1963, Dallas was nicknamed “the city of hate”. In the weeks and months following the assassination and its aftermath citizens of elsewhere wrote to various public forums and officials to express their hatred of the city and its citizens. The planning of the assassination site was silently implicated in the endless interrogation of the crime, through analytical mapping and models, as well as the ever-present landmarks represented in documentation of the assassination. In response to these events, the city introduced a number of new architectural and urban planning gestures to aid in the economic and social recovery from this tragic event. Re-planning and re-building became a literal rather than metaphorical means for Dallas to make amends for the burden of its history. This paper will examine how the built environment was quietly implicated in the death of President Kennedy, and the measures that were taken to redress the negative portrayal of the city throughout America and the world.

In the lead up to President Kennedy's visit to Dallas on November 22, 1963, local newspapers published planned itineraries for the visit. The motorcade route, as would later be discussed in the Warren Commission Report, combined aspects of standard ceremonial paths with less established choices.¹ Designed to take 45 minutes, and pass by tall buildings to enable mass participation from the public, the presidential motorcade was seen as an opportunity to galvanise public support in anticipation of the election the following year. In 1963, greater Dallas had a population of around one million, and of these more than 200,000 people had gathered in the streets to catch a glimpse of the President and First Lady.² These numbers were made more remarkable given partisan divides in the city. Texas was an important political territory for the Democratic party, but one that had traditionally been subject to a Republican stronghold. The trip, as has been well-documented, was subject to concern having resulted in early signs of unrest, and widespread fears it would be interrupted by protests.³ Such was this concern that in 1964 the Warren Commission Report noted that before leaving his hotel on November 22, President Kennedy had discussed the risks associated with his appearance, commenting:

[I]f anybody really wanted to shoot the President of the United States, it was not a very difficult job—all one had to do was get a high building someday with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt.⁴

Following the devastating events that would occur later that day, the largely unremarkable roadscapes of the motorcade route would become some of the most iconic and recognizable buildings and public spaces in the USA. The grassy knoll, the Bryan Pergola, the Triple Underpass, and the Texas School Book Depository building, would become imbedded in the memories of not only the nation, but the world. They would feature repeatedly in crime scene photographs, re-enactments, and films, that would be replayed for decades in the media and popular culture, as well as being recreated in the model and exhibits used to test and prosecute the case as part of the investigations of the FBI, the secret service, and the Warren Commission. These buildings and backgrounds would become sites of mourning, they would be used to define concepts of dark tourism, and become the locus and focus of conspiracy theorists, who to this day gather on the site to disseminate their beliefs.⁵ The architecture of downtown Dallas would become so associated with its most infamous event that the heritage listing, written almost three decades later, contained the disclaimer:

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that it is not the intent of this study either to endorse or deny any controversial official findings or to support or cast doubt on any theory or speculation that has been advanced since 1963 regarding the identity of the assassin or assassins or the specifics of how President John F. Kennedy was murdered.⁶

As this report implies, there was a belief that the buildings and spaces were essential to understanding the event, and may contain evidence or hidden clues to help unravel the "true" story behind the assassination. Such is the ongoing interest, that in 2020, one can find the presidential motorcade route imbedded in Google Maps.⁷ The streets and buildings of downtown Dallas would be both associated with the assassination and implicated in it. An association that tainted the built environment, as well all aspects of the city and its citizens. This paper will examine how the built environment of Dallas was quietly implicated in the death of President John F. Kennedy, and the measures that were taken to redress the negative portrayal of the city throughout the United States and the world.

"The City of Hate"

In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, blame quickly turned from the lone gunman to the city that had allowed this to happen. Letters sent to Earl Cabell, then Mayor of Dallas, detail the degree of blame that global citizens attributed to the city and its political leaders. Englishwoman Vera Ashe, for example, wrote:

The name of Dallas Texas will stink for evermore.... I would like to torture the man and the bastards behind him who have killed the finest man in America. He should not have been allowed to ride in an open car in your vile town.⁸

Her letter ended with the statement “Dallas, Texas the stinking cesspool of America. Damn you.”⁹

Following the assassination, Dallas residents were famously ostracized and discriminated against when travelling outside of the city.¹⁰ Blame was not just from outsiders, but also from within. A sermon delivered by Reverend William A. Holmes, that would later be broadcast on the national news, traced a pattern of unsociable behavior, proclaiming:

Dallas is the City where three years ago Vice President and Mrs. Johnson were spat upon and cursed at by a seething crowd.... Dallas is the City where many leaders and officials expressed anxiety and “fear of incident” when first learning of the President and Mrs. Kennedy’s intentions to be our guests.... Dallas is the City where fourth grade children in a north Dallas public school, clapped and cheered when their teacher told them of the assassination of the President last Friday. In the name of God, what kind of city have we become?¹¹

This blame was so pronounced that the Warren Commission Report explicitly addressed the anti-Kennedy sentiment in the city, effectively clearing the city of blame—or so its leaders would proclaim in the nation’s newspapers.¹² The assassination and its aftermath led to public soul-searching on a civic scale in Dallas, in Texas and in America. While this initially manifested in focusing on commemorative gestures, and dealing with sites associated with the assassination, it would eventually result in a comprehensive set of social reforms that, among other outcomes, would both directly and indirectly yield some of Dallas’s key works of civic architecture.

The Site

As was often the case following tragic events of this magnitude, early debate focused on the commemoration. There was considerable discussion surrounding whether the memorial should be living or intentional, and whether it should be located in Dallas or Washington. In January 1964 alone, the John F. Kennedy Citizen’s Memorial Commission received more than 600 submissions from the public.¹³ Many locals favoured a memorial near the assassination site rather than Washington. Such gestures were clearly seen as either redemptive, or a grave reminder of what had taken place, from those who believed the city should take responsibility for events that transpired on its soil. Those anxious to distance themselves from the events argued for the memorial to be located in the nation’s capital.¹⁴ Considerable discussion also focused on how to deal with sites directly associated with the assassination. Most contentious was how to handle the Texas Book Depository building, which was further complicated by its private ownership.¹⁵ Stephen Fagin notes that “for many, the building was a physical representation of evil, civic shame, and personal mortification.”¹⁶

What eventuated was a network of interrelated sites that, would eventually be listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Dealey Plaza Historic District. With its symmetrical ponds and peristyles, statues of Dealey and an Obelisk dedicated to “the pioneers of civic progress”—Dealey Plaza already had the character of a commemorative place.¹⁷ In 1967 a series of bronze bas reliefs, mounted on a half-height granite wall, were added. These described the events of November 22, and include a plan of the precinct, locating the significant events and sites. These interpretive measures reinforced, the connection between the events and their dispersed spatial locations within the urban precinct, and were both interpretive and commemorative in character. Three blocks east of the assassination site, the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza was dedicated in 1970. The plaza included a concrete cenotaph designed by Philip Johnson. As Greg Brown has noted, the commemorative plaza was effectively blocked by the Old Dallas County courthouse, and as a result seems dissociated from the key sites at Dealey Plaza.¹⁸ The future of the Texas School Book Depository remained uncertain for almost a decade after it was vacated by its tenant. In 1978 it was purchased and used for County administrative offices, later controversially becoming the Sixth Floor Museum.¹⁹

A Matter of Reputation

Beyond the problem of the sites themselves, the public response to Dallas—and its perceived role in the assassination—prompted broader reflection on the impact of the events. In his 1974 autobiography, prominent Dallas businessman Stanley Marcus recalled that the “Citizens Council was... concerned with the pragmatic effects of the adverse publicity the city was receiving from the international press”, and were particularly worried it might hamper their “ability to get new industries and attract conventions?”²⁰

Among the proposals put forward at this time was one suggesting the city, “engage the services of a public relations firm to restore luster to the tarnished name of Dallas,”²¹ While this idea would not progress, on January 1st 1964, Marcus famously placed local newspaper advertisements with the heading “What’s Right with Dallas”, that cited the future mayor, Erik Jonsson’s, belief “that individuals, corporations and communities should have a regular stock taking of what they are and what they are trying to be, and how they would like to accomplish these objectives”.²² Marcus encouraged the city to take “an honest look at its inventory and ... consider its faults as well as its assets”²³ His proposed reforms, largely centred on social problems related to the built environment, concluding: “The best public relations come from doing good things and by not doing bad things.”²⁴ This advertisement would effectively set the agenda for decades of civic self-examination, and establish the assassination as an unspoken but instrumental force behind decision-making for the planning and governance of the city.

Re-planning the “City of Hate”

The tarnished reputation of Dallas, and the implied association between the morality of the city and its architecture would be the impetus for a number of programs of social and urban reform. In the years immediately following the assassination, the city would benefit from a number of federal initiatives, including President Johnson’s Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 and his “Model Cities” initiative of 1968. The latter pledged to establish neighbourhood centres in “every ghetto in America”.²⁵ However the greatest impact was to come from the city’s own *Goals for Dallas* initiative, that saw the built environment addressed as a part of a comprehensive set of social reforms designed to rehabilitate the moral state and reputation of the city and its citizens.

Goals for Dallas

The Goals for Dallas initiative, announced in November 1964, was instigated by Mayor Erik Jonsson, who had taken office that year. The project responded to the challenge outlined in Marcus’s advertisement, and was inspired by Eisenhower’s *Goals for Americans*, that had featured a section written by Catherine Bauer Wurster.²⁶ The Goals for Dallas initiative involved self-reflection, analyzing existing circumstances, and undertaking community consultation in order to implement a program of civic goal setting. The program was privately administered and non-partisan. A planning committee formed in 1966 was chaired by Jonsson, directed by Bryghte D. Godbold, and included twenty-five community leaders. Following Eisenhower’s model, a 1966 conference, held in Salado Texas, invited citizens to present papers on one of twelve themes, Among the attendees was I.M. Pei, who would go on to design several significant architectural outputs associated with the program.²⁷

The conference included 87 participants, and efforts were made to include a diverse range of citizens and perspectives, although the thresholds were often tokenistic. A subsequent conference was held in 1967, and while the program ended in 1973, a second cycle was four years later.²⁸ More than 100,000 citizens were involved in the first phase of the project, which roughly coincided with Jonsson’s mayoral term.²⁹ The committee itself did not generate the goals and had no mandate to implement them, but rather assisted in overseeing the program, raising funds and assessing their success.³⁰

Across three cycles, 205 goals were set in 17 diverse fields ranging from culture and government through to energy, environment, and education.³¹ While many goals were aspirational—establishing civic values—others involved specific policies and institutions, some of which were likely to generate associated architectural works. Among the objectives for continuing education, was one to establish a new central library for downtown. This resulted in the construction of the Erik Jonsson Central Library, designed by Fisher and Spillman Architects, which opened in 1982. Spillman, then President of the AIA Dallas Chapter, had authored the initial “Design of the City” paper, presented at the Salado Conference.³²

The central goal of the “Design of the City” section was “a city of beauty and functional fitness that enhances the quality of life for all its people.”³³ It also named a series of specific goals that ranged from establishing a Department of City Planning, though to designing a “Central Business District as a multi-purpose area for commercial, governmental, educational, cultural, recreational and residential use.”³⁴ Similarly, the nine goals outlined for housing predominantly focused on policies and strategies for improving the access and quality of affordable housing, including gentrification strategies for sustainable neighborhoods (in terms of both energy use, as well as being socially sustainable), rather than identifying specific projects or construction goals. Many of these anticipated the tone of architecture policies and design quality programs, such as those later developed in Australia by Government Architects, and the Design Council in the UK.

While the program had minimal representation from the architectural profession, some of its key acknowledged “outputs” were architectural. Goals for Dallas is credited with yielding a network of public buildings and infrastructure, that included the Dallas County Community College District, the Dallas Convention Centre and the new Museum of Art. The latter, along with the Library and I.M. Pei’s Concert Hall (1989), were identified as outcomes for goals to expand the recreational and entertainment areas in the CBD.³⁵ The Art Museum, also responded to goals for expanding cultural facilities.³⁶ Concrete links between the program and its products however, are difficult to find outside of the archives, and are largely substantiated via the organization’s 1982 publication *Goals for Dallas: The Possible Dreams*, or are often cited anecdotally.³⁷ Its role was, it seems strongest, in advocacy, or “consciousness raising” as Pat Spillman would later state.³⁸ Among the most commonly cited projects associated with the program was the Dallas Fort Worth Airport, although it is not listed as a direct goal or outcome. Spillman argued:

There was a flurry of activity in doing things and getting things done....Now, you can’t say that Goals for Dallas is responsible for DFW Airport. That would be a stretch. But in creating, at least for a little while, a certain consciousness, it probably helped to move that enterprise into reality.³⁹

The link between Goals for Dallas and the Dallas City Hall, is similarly one of established anecdote rather than being evidentiary. No goal pertained specifically to the commissioning of the building, rather it was imbedded within a number related to governance and civic improvement, and those pertaining to “the aesthetic dimension as a powerful and contributory force to community life.”⁴⁰ This latter goal also credited Philip Johnson’s Thanksgiving Square as an outcome. Interestingly, I.M. Pei was awarded the City Hall commission following his selection to design the JFK Library and Museum in Boston.⁴¹ At the time of its completion, Jonsson was quoted in an issue of *Progressive Architecture*, stating:

People in Dallas were being talked about in every other quarter of the world as living in a city of hate... We wanted architecture of outstanding quality...the strength, the inner simplicity that almost inevitably goes with beauty and the straightforward look that to me sums up what Texans were and how they felt and how they stood up against their problems.⁴²

Like many of the other architectural projects associated with the program, City Hall was seemingly a product of the initiative’s preoccupation for the creation of civic buildings and facilities that were often symbolic of the broader goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the association between the Goals for Dallas program and the assassination was rarely explicitly articulated in its documents, although frequently connected by the press. Interestingly, none of the goals explicitly dealt with the Kennedy assassination or its site, but rather addressed the issue indirectly through strategies of improvement through beautification, and moral reform—with the two ideals often linked. As such, the intent was as others have noted, reminiscent of the aspirations of the City Beautiful movement.

A 1975 report evaluating the success of the program, stated Jonsson's motivation for introducing it was the desire to "ensure that the future of the city would be shaped by decisions of its citizens rather than by chance."⁴³ The measures taken in Dallas to address and ameliorate the impact of the Kennedy assassination are in many ways akin to what might now be called post-traumatic urbanism. As other American cities like Richmond Virginia—which once served as the capital of the American confederacy—grapple with ways to reconcile the city of the present with the problematic histories imbedded in or associated with its architecture and urban planning, this case study become of renewed interest. The measures taken by Dallas, following the assassination of President Kennedy, while of varying degrees of successes, are an example of how the redemptive power of architecture and urban design has been explored.

Endnotes

¹ *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), also known as the Warren Commission Report.

² Conover Hunt, *Dealey Plaza National historic Landmark*, (Dallas: Sixth Floor Museum, 1997), 25, 27

³ For a discussion of the political climate in Dallas at the time, see Bill Minutaglio and Steven L Davis, *Dallas 1963: The Road to the Kennedy Assassination*, (London: John Murray, 2013) and the Warren Commission Report.

⁴ *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, 42.

⁵ For a discussion of dark tourism in relation to the assassination site see: Malcolm Foley & J. John Lennon, "JFK and dark tourism: A fascination with assassination", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2, no. 4 (1996): 198-211, DOI:10.1080/13527259608722175.

⁶ "Dealey Plaza Historic District" National Register of Historical Places. Prepared by Ms. Conover Hunt, for the Dallas County Historical Foundation, as revised and edited by James H. Charleton, Historian, 1991. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/46c02f0c-eff8-4f58-8a61-f298233bd7d9>.

⁷ See for example the user uploaded map, titled "JFK Presidential Motorcade route", available at: www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1rQcR1r8Q8mv4BO9oWuppaMQa0Mg&hl=en_US&usp=sharing.

⁸ Letter, From Vera Ashe to 'All the people of Dallas, Texas', November 22, 1963 Earl Cabell Papers, Series 4 - Mayoral, 1957-1964 Box 10, Folder 23, Southern Methodist University.

⁹ Letter, From Vera Ashe to "All the people of Dallas, Texas", November 22, 1963 Earl Cabell Papers, Series 4 - Mayoral, 1957-1964 Box 10, Folder 23, Southern Methodist University.

¹⁰ Stephen Fagin, notes, for example, "Dallas residents travelling outside of state were often reluctant to reveal their hometown for fear of criticism or worse reprisals." See: Stephen Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration: JFK Dallas, and the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013): xxv.

¹¹ This fallout from this speech is discussed in Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration*, 26-7. A transcript of part of this speech is included in Rebecca Onion, "In the JFK Aftermath, A Dallas Minister's Moving, Controversial Sermon Against Extremism", *Slate*, November 20, 2013, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/11/jfk-assassination-william-holmes-sermon-pleading-with-dallas-to-acknowledge-its-complicity.html>; and a film of part of the speech can be found here: <https://youtu.be/TvVeKUMsC-U>.

¹² *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, 415; "Dallas Absolved, Civic Leaders Say", *New York Times*, September 28, 1964.

¹³ These can be found in the John F Kennedy Citizens Memorial Commission Files, Stanley Marcus Collection, A93.1860, Box 9, Folder 3. Southern Methodist University.

¹⁴ On this latter point, Greg Brown wrote: “The faction of citizens already at work to distance Dallas from the assassination (including, perhaps surprisingly, former mayor R.L. Thornton) argued that no memorial was necessary here; the more appropriate place would be the nation's capital.” See: Greg Brown. “Forever Changed: The Architecture of Dallas: Reframed by the Kennedy Assassination.” *AIA Dallas* (n.d.), Retrieved September 07, 2020, from <https://www.aiadallas.org/v/columns-detail/Forever-Changed-The-Architecture-of-Dallas-Reframed-by-the-Kennedy-Assassination/92/>.

¹⁵ Aubrey Mayher purchased the building was from D Harold Byrd,. Mayhew was a Kennedy collector, who intended to turn it into a memorial center to house his collection of Kennedy memorabilia, and to acquire additional land surround the site to build a and a library to honour RFK (Fagin, 40) however financial impediments led to the building being required by Byrd in 1972, and eventually purchased by the Country in 1977. For an account of these circumstances see Brown, “Forever Changed”, and Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration*, 37-43.

¹⁶ Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration*, xxv.

¹⁷ The plaque reads “Dealey Plaza. Birthplace of Dallas. Within this small park was built the first home, which also served as the first courthouse and postoffice, the first store and the first fraternal lodge. Dedicated to the pioneers of civic progress by order of the park board.”

¹⁸ Brown writes: “In April, Dallas County commissioners designated a site for the memorial on Main Street just a couple of blocks from Dealey Plaza. (Interestingly, the “Old Red” Courthouse and other county buildings shielded the block from a view of the murder site itself.)”. Greg Brown, “Forever Changed: The Architecture of Dallas: Reframed by the Kennedy Assassination.” *AIA Dallas*, (n.d) Retrieved September 07, 2020, from <https://www.aiadallas.org/v/columns-detail/Forever-Changed-The-Architecture-of-Dallas-Reframed-by-the-Kennedy-Assassination/92/>.

¹⁹ Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration*, xxv.

²⁰ Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001 (1974)): 257.

²¹ Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store*, 256.

²² Erik Jonsson cited in Stanley Marcus, “What’s Right With Dallas”, reproduced in *Minding the Store*, 258. A similar (and earlier) initiative to improve the morale and the city, included the “A Hundred days of Love” campaign. For a discussion of this refer to Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration*, 27.

²³ Marcus, “What’s Right With Dallas”, in *Minding the Store*: 258.

²⁴ Marcus, “What’s Right With Dallas”, in *Minding the Store*, 258.

²⁵ “11 Cities to Set Up Neighborhood Units to Advise the Poor”, *New York Times*, January 9, 1968. Documents associated with Dallas’s participation in the program are held in The University of North Texas, among other places. At the time of writing this paper, it was not possible to access these materials. See: <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/unt/00018/unt-00018.html>.

²⁶ The publication associated with this initiative was: United States. President's Commission on National Goals. *Goals for Americans: Programs for Action in the Sixties, Comprising the Report of the President's Commission on National Goals and Chapters Submitted for the Consideration of the Commission* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960).

²⁷ “I.M. Pei: An Oral History Interview”, conducted by Bonnie A. Lovell, New York, August 1 2020. Available via Dallas Public library: https://dallaslibrary2.org/dallashistory/oralHistory/transcripts_pdf/PeileohMing_transcript.pdf.

²⁸ John Kellogg and Paul Zigman, *Goals For Dallas (C)*, C16-85-637 0, (Kennedy School of Government Case Program, 1985).

²⁹ Nininger, J. R., V. N. MacDonald, and G. Y. McDiarmid, *Goals for Dallas 'A': An experiment in community goal setting*. (Kingston [Ont.]: School of Business, Queen's University, 1975): 17.

³⁰ Nininger, et al. *Goals for Dallas 'A'*, 17.

³¹ *Goals For Dallas: The Possible Dreams*, (Dallas: Goals For Dallas Inc., April 1982), 5.

³² “Pat Y. Spillman: An Oral History Interview”, Conducted by Bonnie A. Lovell Highland Park, Texas December 30, 2002 Goals for Dallas Oral History Project Interview: 333 Transcribed by Krystal R. Manansal. Available via the Dallas Public Library: https://dallaslibrary2.org/dallashistory/oralHistory/transcripts_pdf/SpillmanPatY_transcript.pdf Spillman recounts in this oral history that he suggested this section for inclusion.

³³ *Goals for Dallas - Mutual Aims of Its Citizens* (Rev. 2d ed. Dallas, Tex: Goals for Dallas, 1967), 6-7. Excerpt available via: <https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/50-years-ago-the-mayor-formulated-dozens-of-goals-for-dallas-so-howd-we-do-7149705>.

³⁴ *Goals for Dallas - Mutual Aims of Its Citizens*, 6-7.

³⁵ “Recreation and Leisure Time”, Goal 11, *Goals For Dallas: The Possible Dreams*, 296

³⁶ “Cultural Activities”, Goal 5, “New and/or expanded existing facilities for the performing arts and innovative cultural use of existing buildings, in *Goals For Dallas: The Possible Dreams*, 72.

³⁷ While some research for this paper was undertaken in Erik Jonsson's papers at Southern Methodist University, the Goals for Dallas papers held there were not consulted at that time. It is possible these will provide more concrete links.

³⁸ "Pat Y. Spillman: An Oral History Interview", 34.

³⁹ "Pat Y. Spillman: An Oral History Interview", 34.

⁴⁰ *Goals For Dallas: The Possible Dreams*, 32.

⁴¹ Michael T. Cannell. *I.M. Pei: Mandarin of Modernism* (New York: Carol Southern Books 1995), 198.

⁴² Peter Papademetriou, "Angling for a civic monument", *Progressive Architecture*, (May 1979): 103.

⁴³ Niningger, et al., *Goals for Dallas 'A*, 7.