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## Assassination U

*David Jones isn't a conspiracy theorist, but he still is fascinated by John F. Kennedy's assassination. On the eve of the 34th anniversary of the Dallas slaying, Jones will teach a Minneapolis seminar focusing on the myriad theories about the president's death.*

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DAVID HAWLEY STAFF WRITER

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**D**avid Jones was a 2-year-old toddler when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963. For Jones, the slaying is an event in history -- an incident that occurred before living memory.

This may be one reason Jones isn't a conspiracy theorist. He's very interested in learning about Kennedy assassination theories, but not in preaching them.

Jones has become a historian of conspiracy, wading through the hundreds of theories on the Kennedy assassination. On Friday, the eve of the 34th anniversary of the Dallas slaying, Jones will offer some of his insights at a seminar sponsored by Open U in Minneapolis.

He has conducted similar seminars in the past, and he always starts the class with a quiz.

"I ask everyone to rate themselves on a scale of one to five," Jones says. "One represents those who believe, 100 percent, that it was Lee Harvey Oswald alone who did it. Five is for those who are convinced that the assassination was a massive conspiracy.

"The room usually divides into ones and fives," says Jones, who makes his living as an insurance analyst for Lutheran Brotherhood. "Very few are in the middle."

Jones, however, rates himself as a two. "I believe that Oswald acted alone, but I also acknowledge that there's a preponderance of conflicting evidence that I can't explain," he says.

The surviving players in the JFK era now are elderly, and those who remember him as a living president are entering middle age. Yet many of the controversies about John Kennedy's life and death grow more heated with each passing year.

Kennedy's portrait was on the cover of Time Magazine last week when the magazine published a nearly unbridled attack on Seymour Hersh's new book, "The Dark Side of Camelot," which alleges new Mafia connections to the Kennedy clan. The president's family, including Kennedys in Congress and a son in the magazine business, continue to be the target of expose stories about strained marriages, alcoholism and sexual escapades.

And the assassination? Nearly 700 books have been written about the president's death. In 1993, on the 30th anniversary, two dozen new conspiracy books arrived in bookstores in a single week. More theories, according to Jones, are on the way.

Most older Americans can recall where they were when they learned the president had been shot. Jones can't do that, of course. But as a member of the new generation of assassination enthusiasts, he has his own pivotal memory.

"It was March of 1975 when they first allowed a televised broadcast of the Zapruder film," Jones says.

Abraham Zapruder was the Dallas spectator whose 8-millimeter camera caught pictures of Kennedy being hit by assassin's bullets -- including the grisly image of the president's head exploding from the shot that killed him.

The short loop of grainy film now is so familiar that it is hard to recall the furor caused by the first public showing of a president being murdered. In 1975, Jones was a 14-year-old junior high student from St. Peter who stayed up late to watch the film's first TV broadcast on "Goodnight America," a weekend tabloid show hosted by Geraldo Rivera.

"The following Monday, I went to the library at school and looked for anything I could find," he recalls. "I guess I've been at it ever since."

His interest has resulted in a personal collection of more than 100 books on the Kennedy assassination. He also has visited Dallas twice, gone to the Kennedy grave at Arlington National Cemetery and visited the Kennedy Library in Massachusetts. In addition, he subscribes to several

assassination journals and attends national conventions for assassination enthusiasts.

He's read the 1964 Warren Commission Report, of course. That's the official version of events that includes the lone gunman account of Oswald firing three bullets at Kennedy's motorcade -- two of them hitting the president -- as it passed the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas. The Warren Commission concluded that the first of those shots, dubbed by critics as "the magic bullet," struck the president in the back, exited through his neck, then struck and exited the chest of Texas Gov. John Connolly before smashing into Connolly's wrist. The third and fatal shot, according to the report, struck Kennedy in the right side of his head.

And, of course, Jones has read the 1979 report by the House Select Committee on Assassinations. That report concluded that Kennedy's assassination was part of a conspiracy and that four shots -- rather than three -- were fired at the motorcade. The extra shot, according to the committee, might have come from the famous "grassy knoll" near the parade route.

But who fired it? Was it the mob? The CIA? A clumsy Secret Service agent? An anti-Castro operative? A pro-Castro operative? All of the above?

And who was firing from the sixth-floor window of the book depository? Was it really Oswald, or was it a "second" Oswald?

There's no shortage of theories. In his 1991 film, "JFK," filmmaker Oliver Stone alleged the conspiracy had many players, including the CIA, the Mafia and a bunch of Cubans. Others think Lyndon Johnson, hungering for the presidency, was behind the conspiracy. Still others say the villains were Russians. Some think it was all of the above.

Each of the various theories has its own evidence. "The class is only one night, so I can only touch on some of it," Jones says.

Some of his examples include the famous "doctored" backyard photo of Oswald holding his mail-ordered Manlicher-Carcano rifle in one hand, a wad of propaganda flyers in the other hand and a pistol in his belt. Another is a series of Oswald photographs that show, according to one theorist, that there was a "second" Oswald, a lookalike who did the shooting.

There's the "curtain rod" story, offered as evidence that

Oswald really didn't conceal his rifle in wrapped paper when he rode with a friend to the book depository on the day of the assassination. Then there's the testimony of Sylvia Odio, who says she met Oswald in the company of some anti-Castro Cubans and learned of their plan to assassinate Kennedy (he was supposed to be in Mexico at the time, according to official accounts).

There are the ``head shot'' frames from the Zapruder film that theorists like Jim Garrison (he was portrayed by Kevin Costner in the movie) offered as proof that the fatal bullet came from the front, not from behind. And there are conflicting conspiracies about the autopsy, along with allegedly conflicting testimony by Oswald's wife, Marina.

``I don't debunk any of this or argue in favor it," Jones says. ``For me, that's part of the fascination about the assassination -- that there is so much passion about it, so many questions. It changed America, I think. It changed the way people think about America."

The top conspiracy theories

President Kennedy was killed by:

- The Mafia
- The CIA
- A rogue element of the CIA
- A collaboration by the CIA and the Mafia
- Pro-Castro Cubans or anti-Castro Cubans
- Collaborators from the CIA, the Mafia and Cuba
- Russians
- The FBI
- An Oswald lookalike
- Aides to Lyndon Johnson

``JFK Assassination -- the Mystery & Legend'' will be held Friday at Open U, 706 N. First St., Minneapolis. Time: 7-9:30 p.m. Cost: \$15. For details call 349-9273 or check Open U's Internet site (<http://www.openuinc.com>).