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Critical Thinking Class Dissects JFK Assassination During This 50th Anniversary

Winthrop University

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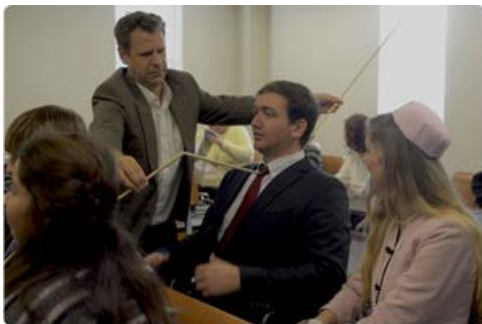
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Critical Thinking Class Dissects JFK Assassination During This 50th Anniversary

Quick Facts

- The English instructor took a general education critical thinking class and added a twist: the class spent the entire semester focused on what happened during the assassination of John F. Kennedy, our 35th president.
- The 50th anniversary of the shooting in Dallas took place Nov. 22, coinciding with the end of the course.



Bryan Ghent aids his students in re-enacting JFK's assassination and showing the bullet trajectory.

ROCK HILL, S.C. – So, who killed Kennedy?

Bryan Ghent's class at Winthrop University may not know, but they have examined it from multiple perspectives over the fall semester.

The English instructor took a **general education critical thinking class** and added a twist: the class spent the entire semester focused on what happened during the assassination of John F. Kennedy, our 35th president. The **50th anniversary** of the shooting in Dallas took place Nov. 22,

coinciding with the end of the course.

Conspiracy theories abound about the man arrested for the crime, **Lee Harvey Oswald**; whether there were other shooters on the nearby grassy knoll; what groups were behind the assassination; the **"magic bullet"** that the president was shot by the same bullet that also injured **Texas Gov. John Connally**, who sat in the front seat of the presidential limousine; or why did **Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby** then fatally shoot Oswald when the lone gunman was in police custody.

For many Americans, the assassination ended an innocent era and led to a decade of strife about the **Vietnam War**, **civil rights legislation** and the **fatal shootings of other American leaders**.

Winthrop students read two books in the course: the conspiracy theory book, **"Crossfire"** by **Jim Marrs**, and Oswald as the lone gunman book, **"Case Closed"** by **Gerald Posner**. The class spent Nov. 9-10 in Dallas touring the **Texas Schoolbook Depository**, the **Dealey Plaza** and the **grassy knoll**.

The class has attracted quite a bit of media attention, including from **NBC news**, the **Dallas Morning News**, **Charlotte Observer**, (**Rock Hill**) **Herald** and some online sites.

The only person in the class who was alive at the time of the assassination was **Kathy Davis**, a physical education faculty member taking the course out of curiosity. She recounted watching the **legendary CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite** almost lose his composure as he announced Kennedy's death.

Television also captured, she said, **Ruby gunning down Oswald** two days after the assassination, while Oswald was being transferred from police headquarters to the county jail. Then a 7-year-old, she and the rest of the country sat in amazement as **Ruby killed Oswald** in full view of the television cameras.

Davis said she was surprised at the **Winthrop students' enthusiasm** for learning about the JFK assassination. "I didn't think they would be that interested," she said.

Interested, indeed.

The students discussed, argued and dissected plenty of documents. Their final conclusion, if you can call it that, was that the **Warren Commission** charged with finding out what happened, botched the investigation because they didn't follow up on basic leads.

After the Dallas trip, students wrote:

- **Aaron Ball** – "All of the research and discussions that had taken place in class about the assassination could not have prepared me for the somber feeling that took over when standing in that historic part of the city. You could almost visualize the crowds, the motorcade, and the excitement that filled the air that day; which would forever be remembered for the tragedy it beheld."
- **Linda O'Connor** – "If Kennedy's murder was some sort of a conspiracy within our government, and I believe it was, then it seems to me that these tours, museums, and gift shops are exactly what our government wants for its people. It's a distraction. If we listen to the recordings, take pictures of the fence, and drive past the Texas Theater, we'll check that box off on our "neat things to do" list and go home with a magnet to remind us that we cared for a day. We won't think about what our country might be like now, if a man named John F. Kennedy hadn't been murdered that day."
- **Rachel Trueblood** – "I will say that from visiting Dallas, my idea of the assassination has become simultaneously more clear and yet more clouded. I have come to the personal conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was involved in the JFK assassination but I do not believe that he acted alone, nor do I believe that he was a crazed madman without a purpose. Dallas opened my eyes to how hard it has been for America to escape and overcome John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination and I hope that in 25 years, the documents will finally be released. I hope that we will find a resolution to offer us comfort in our ruminations of our fallen President and how the world could have been had he lived."
- **Eric Setzer** – "The class trip to Dallas was a very beneficial trip to help truly understand the things we have studied throughout the semester. Actually being in Dealey Plaza was a great experience. There are many self-proclaimed experts about the JFK assassination, but to get a true prospective on the events, which occurred that November day, one must first visit Dealey Plaza to get a true feeling for the area and the angles around the plaza."
- **Lauren Miller** – "Our class might not know the truth about what happened on November 22, but we know enough to recognize the lies presented as the truth."

Ghent said he isn't sure what he believes now, even after studying it for years.

His course's final exam will ask the students to reflect on **one of Kennedy's most famous lines**: 'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.'

Ghent encouraged the students to ponder what activist role they can take in their own lives.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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