



January 1992

Conclusion: On the Establishment of Journalistic Authority

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Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Zelizer, B. (1992). Conclusion: On the establishment of journalistic authority. In *Covering the body: The Kennedy assassination, the media, and the shaping of collective memory* (pp. 189-261). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/72

NOTE: At the time of publication, author Barbie Zelizer was affiliated with Temple University. Currently (March 2008), she is a faculty member at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Conclusion: On the Establishment of Journalistic Authority

Abstract

This book began with somewhat amorphous and tentative thoughts on the workings of journalistic authority, by which the media assume the right to present authoritative versions of events. Journalistic authority was approached as a construct implicitly but identifiably located within the practices of American journalists.

These pages have shown that journalistic authority is neither amorphous nor tentative. It exists in narrative, where journalists maintain it through the stories they tell. By varying who tells these stories, how they tell them, and what they do or do not tell, journalists enact their authority as a narrative craft, embodied in narrative forms.

These narratives are then transported into collective memory, where they are used as models for understanding the authoritative role of the journalist and journalistic community. Specific narratives signal different boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice and help clarify the boundaries of cultural authority across time and space. This is what Jiirgen Habermas, Max Weber, and others called rhetorical legitimation, the ability of retellers to legitimate themselves through the stories they tell in public discourse.

Comments

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TWELVE Conclusion: On the Establishment of Journalistic Authority

You are, among other things, what you remember, or believe you remember.¹

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These pages have shown that journalistic authority is neither amorphous nor tentative. It exists in narrative, where journalists maintain it through the stories they tell. By varying who tells these stories, how they tell them, and what they do or do not tell, journalists enact their authority as a narrative craft, embodied in narrative forms. These narratives are then transported into collective memory, where they are used as models for understanding the authoritative role of the journalist and journalistic community. Specific narratives signal different boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice and help clarify the boundaries of cultural authority across time and space. This is what Jürgen Habermas, Max Weber, and others called rhetorical legitimation, the ability of retellers to legitimate themselves through the stories they tell in public discourse.

Rhetorical legitimation was shown here to work in a circular fashion: Narratives beget authority, which begets memories, which beget more narratives, which beget more authority, and so on. At the heart of this circular process are journalists, who, like Hayden White's makers of historical discourse, produce a second-order fiction that attends through its craft to the needs of its chroniclers.²

The workings of journalistic authority were explored here through one critical incident, the assassination of John F. Kennedy. By examining how the media narratively reconstructed their role in covering Kennedy's assassination, these pages considered a range of narrative practices by which journalists upheld their own stature, cre-

dentials, and positioning as the authoritative spokespersons of the story. By contextualizing, telling, promoting, and recollecting assassination tales, journalists—especially the emerging cadre of television journalists—fashioned themselves into an authoritative interpretive community.

This does not suggest that journalistic authority exists in complete form in any given narrative or memory system. Authority exists in bits and pieces, fits and starts. It is a construct in continual tension with its creators, never becoming embodied by one practice. Parts of journalistic authority exist everywhere. But without the other parts, it exists nowhere.

The Argument, Refined

Three threads were shown to be relevant to the establishment and perpetuation of journalistic authority:

Journalistic authority emanates from context. This includes contextual factors both at the time of Kennedy's death and in the years that followed. At the time of the assassination, context included discourses about the boundaries of cultural authority and historical relevance, journalistic professionalism and the nascent medium of television news, and the ties between journalists and the Kennedy administration. In addition, covering Kennedy's death created specific circumstances that journalists used as a springboard for narratively upholding their authority. In the years that followed, larger questions about documentary process and consequent changes in the recognized forms of cultural authority also left an imprint on assassination retellings: official memory was de-authorized and professional memories, particularly those of journalists, were made relevant. In each case, collective assessments about journalism proved crucial to the eventual promotion of journalists as a preferred and authoritative presence in the assassination story.

Journalistic authority depends on collective memory. Journalistic authority derives from memory systems, or shared ways of recollecting events across time and space. Memory systems give journalists a way to connect with ready-made interpretations of their tales: individual tales stressed celebrity, organizational and institutional tales emphasized professional lore, and tales about the structure of the profession underscored the role of history. These ways of remembering consolidated the role of journalistic recollectors as cultural authorities.

Journalistic authority depends on narrative. The craft of narrative brings together the other two threads, memory and context. Through

narrative, journalists linked contexts—about the sixties, television, the changing authority of official documents—with memory systems—about celebrity, professional lore, history. Narrative allowed journalists to connect discourses situated outside journalism with developments taking place within it. More important, narrative implicitly and explicitly focused on the people who generated it, the journalists.

Journalists worked these three threads together to create what I call journalistic authority. Through these threads they turned the assassination story on angles crucial to their own legitimation. Often the results bore little connection to the lingering public criticisms of many journalists' performance.

Context, Memory, Narrative, and Critical Incidents

Not all events covered by the media are central to their establishment as cultural authorities. But certain events function as critical incidents, which journalists use to display and negotiate the appropriate boundaries of their profession. During the sixties and early seventies, for example, a number of critical events embodied distinctive "sixties perceptions" about everyday life; its fusion with history and historical relevance, shifting boundaries of cultural authority, growing demands on professionalism, and a spirit of self-reflexivity. Journalists' efforts to define the appropriate boundaries of their profession prompted them to use narratives about these events to air relevant concerns. Watergate, for example, the scandal that journalists uncovered, displayed the appropriate boundaries of investigative journalism. Vietnam, the war that television brought into American homes, gave rise to questions about the responsibilities and roles of journalists in conducting wartime coverage. Space exploration televisually connected American audiences with new frontiers. Like such events as the Civil War in the nineteenth century or the Teapot Dome scandal in the earlier twentieth, each of these critical incidents highlighted issues that were central to journalism at the time of its unfolding, issues that were refracted as the event was retold.

By illuminating relevant rules and conventions about journalistic practice and authority, critical incidents give the media alternative ways in which to discuss, challenge, and negotiate boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice. This in turn allows journalists to set up collective notions about journalistic practice and thereby uphold themselves as an authoritative interpretive community.

In such a light, narratives about the Kennedy assassination consti-

tute one stage among many on which journalists evaluate, challenge, and negotiate consensual notions about what it means to be a reporter. Journalists used the assassination story to address changing rules of their profession, their approaches to new technologies of news gathering, their role in determining historical record, and finally the importance of their own memories in establishing and perpetuating their role as cultural authorities. In retelling assassination tales journalists thus attended to several agendas, many of which had little to do with the events of Kennedy's death.

The Craft of Journalistic Authority

The establishment and perpetuation of journalists as authoritative spokespersons for the assassination story was no small feat. As this book has shown, "The process of adjusting the fit [between what actually happened and received narratives about the past] is an ongoing one, subject to continual debate and exchanges in which memory and history may play shifting, alternately more or less contentious roles in setting the record straight."³ The tale's original recasting as a story of professional triumph rather than mishap was only the first order of reconstructive work. Journalists' reconstruction of their presence, participation, and memories required careful attention over the decades following Kennedy's death. The transformations of journalists' narratives and memories in accordance with larger discourses about cultural authority were systematic, constant, and inventive. Problematic dimensions of the original coverage of Kennedy's death were erased as larger collective questions about professionalism, technology, and authority came into play. Narrative retellings of the assassination thus took place in the face of other developments that assisted journalists in their establishment as cultural authorities.

Journalistic authority was achieved through both the form and content of journalists' narratives. Form refers to the narrative practices that journalists used; content, to the types of stories those practices embodied. Form and content in turn displayed features that were internal (within the narrative itself) and external (existing beyond the narrative). Portrayed graphically, the craft of journalistic authority might resemble the figure opposite.

In their tales, journalists systematically and strategically incorporated references to their authoritative presence across all four domains. In attending to form, they used narrative strategies of synecdoche, omission, and personalization to adjust their tales internally in a way that accommodated their presence. Externally, they

used strategies of commemoration and recycling to gain stature. Similarly, journalists manipulated issues of internal content in stories about being the first, the best, and the only, at the same time as they manipulated issues of external content to address themes about journalistic professionalism, the impact of television technology, the validity of official documents, and the importance of memory. Journalists' ability to uphold their authoritative presence in both internal and external dimensions of the form and content of their narratives left little doubt about their positioning as preferred spokespersons.

Journalists further maintained their authoritative presence as their tales were disseminated across time and space. Taking on the roles of eyewitness, representative, investigator, and interpreter ensured that, regardless of their own proximity to the events of the assassination tale, journalists were able to speak authoritatively about it. The appeal to memory systems also helped fasten journalists in authoritative roles. They used tales of celebrity to uphold the stature of individual journalists, tales of professional lore to promote the stature of news organizations and institutions, and tales about the role of journalism in serving as a historical chronicle of the nation's impulses to promote the structure of the profession. In each case, memory was codified, then fed back to its codifiers, who codified it yet again. Journalists thereby perpetuated a tightly knit cycle of self-legitimation through narrative. This suggests the central role of discourse in determining the community's boundaries.

	FORM (Practices of)	CONTENT (Stories about)
Internal to each narrative	synecdoche omission personalization	being the first being the best being the only
External to each narrative	commemoration recycling	journalistic professionalism television technology validity of official documents professional memory

Technology, Professionalism, and Memory

Discourse about the Kennedy assassination was refracted through lenses of journalistic professionalism and technology. Technology helped the media classify improvisational activities as professional, at the same time as it gave reporters a way to establish custody over memories. Mastering the technology became almost as important as

mastering the events of the coverage, linking cultural authority with the successful use of technology.

In retelling the assassination, journalists referenced three functions of technology: transmission (conveying information), documentation (providing new means for testing evidence), and storage (preserving assassination tales so that they could be retold). To establish their mastery over the tales they told, journalists at times reordered these technological functions. For example, Walter Cronkite's use of new technologies—imaging processes with which he reexamined assassination documents—exemplified his creative use of technology on a "Nova" segment. This tactic prevented assassination tales from being classified as tales about faceless, unmanned "great machines." Journalists turned tales of unpeopled technologies into stories about how individuals strategically used technology to accomplish professional and social aims in new and improvised ways.⁴ Similarly, journalists' reworking of the assassination story into a tale about the rise of television was a testament to their persistent efforts to remain active players within it.

This was true of the retellings of other events too. Journalists drew upon their mastery of satellite-fed technology to tell the story of the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf.⁵ The story of the Vietnam War focused on the technological devices that helped the media record graphic dimensions of the war and its effects. It is no coincidence that media critic Michael Arlen coined the term "the living-room war" for the Vietnam experience, thereby defining it through its technology of transmission.⁶ Journalists' tales of covering these stories were thus largely determined by their relationship to technology.

Tales of technological mastery are therefore crucial for revealing journalists as willing and able to manipulate the technology at hand in the name of professionalism. While certain technologies gave rise to more plausible stories than others, embedded within each story of technology is a journalist who makes it work. Technology also enhanced the media's capacity for storytelling not only at the time of the event but later too. Over time, many tales of technological mastery helped journalists create archives of memory, making the use of such archives necessary for audiences and other retellers to gain access to the memory. As Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn have suggested, "Whenever memory is invoked, we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in what context and about what."⁷

Thus we have a discourse not only about Kennedy's death but also about the technologies that have transmitted and stored collective memories about his death. Journalism becomes a primary archive or

repository of collective memories, many of which are also about journalists themselves.⁸ The ease with which retellers can gain access to the memory archives created by journalists and news organizations has turned these archives into a mode of documentation preferred over the original documents. As Halbwachs maintained, "The reality of the past is no longer in the past."⁹ Rather, it is in a present narrated and largely controlled by the American media.

Within these developments, the media emerge as the archivists of memories about the events whose stories they tell. Public memory is turned into what Mary Douglas called "the storage system for the social order."¹⁰ As custodians of such a storage system, journalists foster a tightly constructed view of their activities that turns away competitive presences. In other words, by linking issues of professionalism and technology through collective memory, journalists have established themselves as cultural authorities for retelling not only the story of John F. Kennedy's death, but also the stories of a host of other public events, such as the Civil War, Watergate, and the massacre in Tiananmen Square.

The Shape of Journalistic Community

What kind of journalistic community is implied by assassination retellings? Part of the answer lies in those sectors of the community that have been filtered *out* of retellings. Gone are most radio journalists, who played a part in the original coverage of Kennedy's death. Gone too are many local reporters who assisted their national counterparts in covering the story. Gone are those less renowned reporters who are no longer around to tell their tales. The journalists who remain are national reporters, usually employed by television. More important, the journalists who remain continue to have access to the media and to possess the kind of organizational and institutional support necessary for perpetuating their tales. The journalistic community is thus to a large degree shaped by access, technology and medium, individual stature, and position within a news organization. It accedes to the powerful and vocal members among its constituents, and it tells stories in such a vein. Well-known, nationally employed (television) journalists are put forward as the vanguard and prototype of the journalistic community.

This is borne out too by the memory systems through which the media have perpetuated their retellings. In tales that have emphasized the individual journalist, the organization and institution, and the structure of the profession, reporters have developed parallel

categories of who is "allowed" in and who is shunted aside. The retellings that received the most play over time were those that attended to all three dimensions. Tales about Dan Rather, for example, concerned not only his career (the level of the individual journalist) but also his news organization and the status of television news (the organizational/institutional level) and the ability of journalism to retell public events (the level of the structure of the profession). On the other hand, tales that addressed only the level of the individual journalist, such as stories about the investigative reporting of local Texan reporter Penn Jones, may have died out because they were not supported on the level of the organization or institution. The popular emphasis on differences between press and television reporters or on different reportorial roles therefore may not be as relevant here as the relationship between the individual, the organization/institution, and the structure of the profession. Journalists appear to structure their discourse along such dimensions to address what they see as relevant to them as an authoritative interpretive community.

Patterns of crossbreeding support this point. In retellings, journalists stressed how they regularly crossed lines between news organization, and journalistic function. Journalists wrote books and appeared on talk shows, served as anchorpersons instead of reporters, and acted as columnists rather than on-the-spot chroniclers. In this effort, journalists ignored commonly held boundaries about reportorial tasks and involved themselves independent of predetermined tasks, definitional roles, or formal demarcations. Distinctions between generalists and specialists, or anchorpersons and print columnists, emerged as secondary to the consolidation of journalists as one interpretive community that favored the powerful and vocal. This does not imply that a columnist functioned with the same authority as an anchorperson or beat reporter. But that distinction emerged in journalists' tales as secondary to what they felt they shared as a group.

All of this harks back to the role of discourse in serving a cultural, or ritual, function for journalists. Discourse provides a locus where journalists have been able to come together as a community, but not necessarily in accordance with formalized professional cues. While not the only event to do so, the assassination tale has given journalists a way to articulate and negotiate the shifting boundaries of their community. Discourse has made it possible to address problems and issues of concern to members of the profession. There is reason to assume that a similar pattern exists for other kinds of spokespeople in other kinds of discourse. It is thus in the interfaces between social

groups that the significance of cultural authority may ultimately rest.

Implicit in the crafting of journalistic authority are questions about the acquiescence of the American public to the power of the media. Journalistic authority can thrive only with a relatively uncritical and inattentive public. The ability of the media to adjust stories to agendas having little to do with the effective relay of information depends on audiences that pay little heed, protesting only when such adjustments violate or contradict their own experience. Yet most public events preclude the primary audience experience of them. The lack of a mechanism for encouraging and facilitating audience decoding of media narratives thus helps to consolidate journalistic authority. In the case of assassination retellings, in many ways this factor helped establish journalistic authority despite lingering questions about the efficacy of journalistic performance, both at the time of Kennedy's death and in the years that followed.

Acts of Transmission, Narratives of Solidarity: The Role of Discourse in Shaping Community

The discussion in these pages has established that journalists use narrative to maintain their position and stature as an authoritative interpretive community. This notion comprises two points: Journalists function as an interpretive community that authenticates itself through its narratives, and authority has cultural dimensions designed to consolidate journalists into a cohesive group. Both points suggest how narrators might use narrative to establish collective understandings of themselves as cultural authorities. Authority not only helps narrators consolidate themselves into an independent interpretive community, but also it helps them remember events in a way that enhances their collective dignity as professionals.¹¹

Was the tale of "covering the body" of John F. Kennedy a unique event for American journalists? On one level, it appears to have been. Its extreme and unpredictable nature forced reporters to employ improvisational and instinctual behavior to reassert their control. Yet beyond actual coverage, patterns of retelling the event suggest that it had ordinary, recognizable, patterned elements. Journalists' ability to create narrative patterns shaped the assassination into a recognizable news tale, allowing them to reassert through narrative the control they had lost in coverage.

The employment of narrative to make sense of the one type of incident that has been least explained by media researchers—what Gaye Tuchman called "what a story"¹²—suggests that journalists

have developed their own ways to cope with insufficiently developed codes of practice and knowledge. The journalistic community is engaged in constant interpretive activity about its standards of action. When formalized standards of practice fail to function as a blueprint for such action, certain events become critical incidents for journalism professionals.

This highlights the communal and cultural dimensions of journalistic retellings. Journalists use their narratives to address dimensions of their own activity that have been overlooked by formal socializing agents. Discourse about critical incidents allows journalists to air professional concerns raised by certain events. Their constitution as an interpretive group is thus bolstered through discursive practice. Narrative gives journalists stages upon which to rethink the hows and whys of the profession at various points in time and space, according to their own agendas and priorities.

Journalists are better equipped than others to offer a "preferred" version of events because they themselves perpetuate the notion that their version of reality is a preferred one. By codifying their versions in repetitive and systematized mediated narratives, journalists place themselves ahead of other potential retellers, narratively attending to critical events in ways that uphold their authority. This was particularly crucial in retelling the Kennedy assassination, where questions lingered about the media's performance.

This is not to suggest that the transmission of information is irrelevant to the larger picture of establishing cultural authority. The decoding of public events by audiences in particular ways is what lets journalists' authority flourish. But the transmission of information often becomes secondary to the use of that same information for the group that collected it. The extent to which the realization and articulation of community have been critically embedded within the routinized relay of news narrative highlights how it is possible to address aims irrelevant to the efficacy of transmission.

This embedding of "narratives of solidarity" within "acts of transmission" reveals the real workings of cultural authority in discourse. Through narrative, retellers set up an extensive self-referential discourse through which they address, air, challenge, negotiate, and alter the parameters of their standards of action. Authority becomes a marker of collective practice, delineating for other members of the group what is appropriate and preferred.

This suggests a view of authority as a construct anchored within community. Authority generates "a self portrait that unfolds through time . . . and allows the group to recognize itself through the total

succession of images" it generates.¹³ Authority thus plays a central part in authorizing acts of transmission and also in legitimating narratives of solidarity. It allows collectives of retellers to uphold themselves as viable, authoritative, interpretive groups.

On Cultural Authority, Memory, and Community

This study has suggested that cultural authority emerges through a circular system of practices that codify knowledge across time and space. Such a view, welding the perspectives of Durkheim, Giddens, and Halbwachs, has been examined through one practice—that of narrative. This analysis suggests that "the function of narrativity in the production of the historical text"¹⁴ constitutes a viable and effective way for narrators to position and uphold themselves as authorities in culture.

Journalists are one group among possibly many others who use narrative to effect rhetorical legitimation. These pages have shown how they use rhetorical legitimation to address larger issues about their own authority. Such a process is made possible not only by the internal adjustments within every tale of critical incidents, but by the positing of adjustment as a legitimate mode of constructing reality. In other words, rhetorical legitimation underscores basic assumptions about the latitude allowed retellers in all kinds of public discourse.

Particularly in the workings of public discourse, the establishment and perpetuation of authority are tied in with media practices. This book has shown how authority results from an unequal concentration of power among those with media access. Media provide certain retellers with effective ways to display their authority, both to themselves and to others. While journalists are best able to use the media in order to recycle collective codes of knowledge about what makes them an authoritative interpretive community, often their codes do not mirror their experience of events. This makes a consideration of rhetorical legitimation particularly significant. That significance is enhanced because rhetorical legitimation is also used by other groups—such as politicians, academics, and the clergy—who seek to uphold their own authority.

Clifford Geertz tied knowledge to situations of practice, saying that "if you want to understand what a science is, you should look at what the practitioners of it do."¹⁵ Geertz's comment emphasizes the importance of practice in determining the boundaries of cultural authority. This study's emphasis on the people behind what has been termed the "assassination mythology" suggests that an extensive network of

strategic practices fastens that mythology in place.¹⁶ In making use of the assassination tale, people not only give life to the story; they also give life to their own authority to act as spokespersons. More important, they affirm their authority for new generations of onlookers, who will adopt the versions of the tales they tell and accept the appropriations of journalistic practice and authority that their tales imply.

While the construct of professionalism remains important for examining the American journalistic community, this study has suggested that journalists also function as an interpretive community. They share features with other communities of potential retellers, with historians, politicians, and ordinary private citizens—a fact that raises questions about the workings of cultural authority in all kinds of public discourse. What are the mechanisms by which different retellers legitimate themselves through their stories? Why do certain individuals and groups become legitimated over others as spokespersons for events? What are the strategic practices by which they codify knowledge and use it to realize collective gains? And, finally, why does the public cede to retellers the authority they need to construct reality? This study suggests that retellers of all sorts act to legitimate themselves as authoritative interpretive communities, and that they use other groups to do so. In a sense, then, authority is realized by mechanisms for recycling knowledge not only across members of one community but across many communities, not least of all the public.

Journalists' attempts at rhetorical legitimation have generated their own constitutive narratives about American journalism, minimizing what is problematic and emphasizing what is admirable. Retelling the incidents that are critical to the American journalistic community offers an exemplary case of the circular codification of knowledge, by which retellers strategically authenticate themselves as cultural authorities. Discourse, therefore, not only affects group consolidation by achieving community and commonality, it also guides and directs people into their own future. This, then, is how authority acts as a source of codified knowledge, and how the tale of the assassination of America's thirty-fifth president gave rise to one of the major constitutive narratives of American journalism.

over of history to the people on the “Today Show” (“Who Killed JFK?” “Today Show,” NBC News, 7 February 1992).

51. William Manchester, “No Evidence for a Conspiracy to Kill Kennedy,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, 5 February 1992, p. A22.

52. DeLillo, *Libra*, p. 301.

53. John Connally, quoted in “25th Anniversary of JFK’s Assassination,” “Nightline,” ABC News.

54. Halberstam, *Powers That Be*, p. 568. Interestingly, similar claims were advanced about *American Heritage* magazine, which “because of its commitment to visualizing U.S. history” generated a different kind of historical documentation (Rosenzweig, “Marketing the Past,” p. 39).

55. Eric Breitbart, “The Painted Mirror,” in *Presenting the Past*, ed. Benson et al., p. 116.

56. Nora, “Between Memory and History,” p. 13.

57. Breitbart, “Painted Mirror,” p. 111.

58. Tillinghast, *Specious Past*, p. 171.

59. Steve Bell, in “Return to Camelot: Steve Bell and the JFK Years,” Group W Television, 22 November 1988.

12. Conclusion: On the Establishment of Journalistic Authority

1. Morrow, “Of Myth and Memory,” p. 22.

2. Hayden White, “‘Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased’: Literary Theory and Historical Writing,” in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 27.

3. Davis and Starn, “Introduction,” p. 5.

4. See Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Carolyn Marvin, “Experts, Black Boxes and Artifacts: News Categories in the Social History of Electric Media,” in Brenda Dervin et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Communication*, Vol. 2: *Paradigm Exemplars* (London: Sage, 1989), pp. 188–98, for a discussion of how social exchange is shaped by new media.

5. See Barbie Zelizer, “CNN, the Gulf War, and Journalistic Practice,” *Journal of Communication* 42(1), Winter 1992, pp. 68–81.

6. Michael Arlen, *The Living-Room War* (New York: Viking, 1969).

7. Davis and Starn, “Introduction,” p. 2.

8. Peter C. Rollins makes a similar point about journalists and the Vietnam War. See Rollins, “The American War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film and Television,” *American Quarterly* 3 (1984), pp. 419–32. The notion of archival memory is discussed in Nora, “Between Memory and History,” p. 13. Also see Hayden White, “Figuring the Nature,” p. 20.

9. Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 7.

10. Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. 70.

11. The idea of collective dignity is from in Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel, and Bernice Barnett, "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," *Sociological Quarterly* 2 (1986), p. 149.
12. Tuchman, *Making News*, pp. 59–63.
13. Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 86.
14. The term comes from Hayden White, "Figuring the Nature," p. 21.
15. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.
16. Lasch, "Life of Kennedy's Death."

Epilogue: Beyond Journalistic Authority to the Shaping of Collective Memory

1. Stone's film told the story of an unsuccessful attempt during the late 1960s by former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison to prove conspiracy involvement in Kennedy's death. His claim—that the assassination could be laid to a parallel right-wing government motivated by a rising military-industrial complex—was not supported when brought to trial, and charges against the accused, local businessman Clay Shaw, were dismissed. The film was primarily based on three sources: Garrison, *On the Trail of the Assassins*; Marrs, *Crossfire*; and John Newman, *Kennedy and Vietnam* (New York: Warner, 1992). His selection of Garrison's book was in fact problematic, because years earlier critics had been divided in their appraisals of Garrison's investigation of Shaw. See Epstein, "Garrison"; William Turner, "Assassinations: Epstein's Garrison"; and Kirkwood, *American Grotesque*.

2. Talbot, "60s Something," p. 49.

3. Lardner, "On the Set," p. D1. Stone responded to Lardner in "Stone's 'JFK': A Higher Truth?" *Washington Post*, 2 June 1991, p. D3.

4. Jon Margolis, "JFK Movie and Book Attempt to Rewrite History," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1991, p. 19; Richard Zoglin, "More Shots in Dealey Plaza," *Time*, 10 June 1991, pp. 64–66; Lardner, "On the Set," p. D1.

5. The publication *Lies of Our Times* devoted a large section to the issue of precensorship. See, for example, Carl Oglesby, "Who Killed JFK? The Media Whitewash," *Lies of Our Times*, September 1991, pp. 3–6; Zachary Sklar, "Time Magazine's Continuing Cover-Up," *Lies of Our Times*, September 1991, pp. 7–8; Herbert Schiller, "JFK: The Movie," *Lies of Our Times*, September 1991, pp. 6–7. More even-handed media views were laid out in Elaine Dutka, "Oliver Stone Fights Back," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1991, pp. F1, F2; and Jay Carr, "Oliver Stone Defends His Take on 'JFK,'" *Boston Globe*, 11 August 1991, pp. 81, 84. Critics Harrison Livingstone and Harold Weisberg both attacked the film, with Weisberg calling it "a travesty," (quoted in Zoglin, "More Shots in Dealey Plaza," p. 64).

6. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "'JFK': Truth and Fiction," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 January 1992, p. A8.