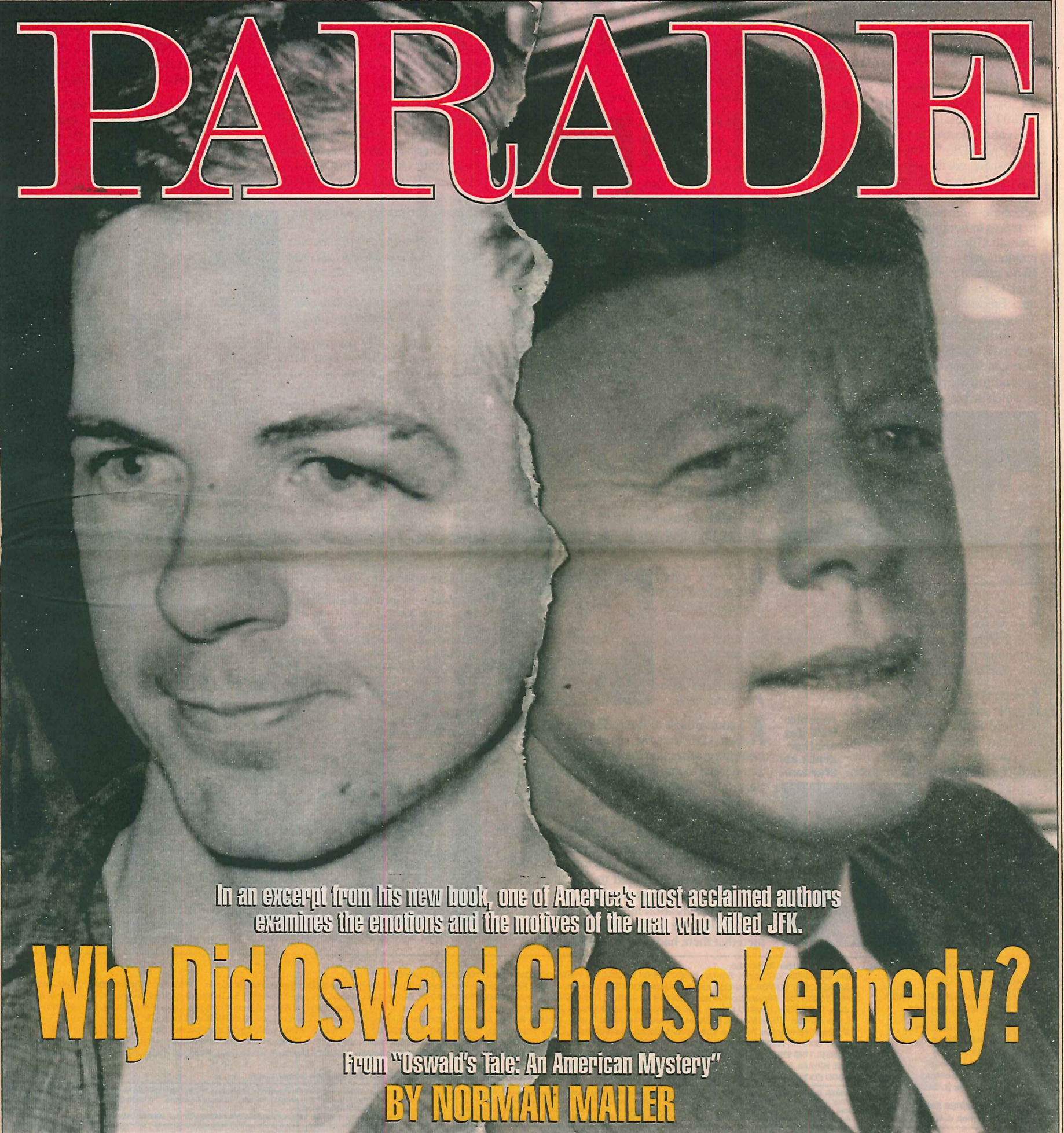


SUNDAY, MAY 14, 1995

Sunday Star-Ledger

PARADE



In an excerpt from his new book, one of America's most acclaimed authors examines the emotions and the motives of the man who killed JFK.

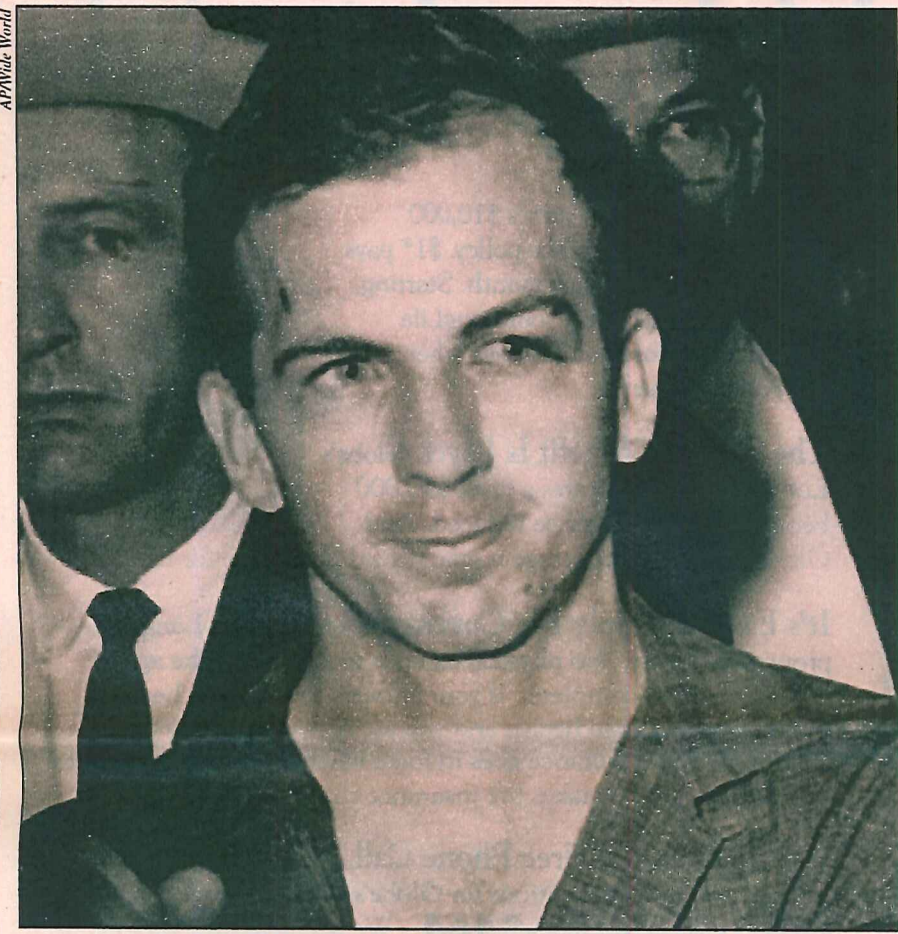
Why Did Oswald Choose Kennedy?

From "Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery"

BY NORMAN MAILER

In a probing analysis of Lee Harvey Oswald, the author Norman Mailer looks carefully and critically

What American



The celebrated novelist Norman Mailer has written a new nonfiction book titled "Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery," just published by Random House. It centers upon the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, including a detailed study of his nearly two years in the Soviet Union and his relationship with Castro's Cuba. To gather his information, Mailer spent months in Russia, talking with people who had known Oswald there, as well as interviewing members of his family, friends and associates who knew him here. His documentary sources include newly available KGB files, the Warren Commission report and other studies analyzing the Kennedy assassination case from all sides. PARADE is privileged to present the following excerpt adapted from the concluding portion of Mailer's book.

BY NORMAN MAILER

DID OSWALD DO IT? If one's answer is to come out of anything larger than an opinion, it is necessary to contend with questions of evidence. In that direction, however, one encounters a jungle of facts and expert estimates as to whether Oswald could fire the shots in time, was a good enough marksman, was the only gunman in Dealey Plaza, and on one can go, trying to explore into every last reach of possibility, only to encounter a disheartening truth: Evidence, by itself, will never provide the answer to a mystery. For it is in the nature of evidence to produce, sooner or later, a counter-interpretation to itself in the form of a contending expert in a court of law.

This applies to the question of Oswald's marksmanship. He is judged by various people, depending on the needs of the ax they grind, to be a poor rifleman, a fair one, a good one, or virtually an expert. Much the same has been stated about the difficulty of the shot itself. It has been estimated to be everything from being easy, as one police expert testified, to nearly impossible.

Such a debate is, however, moot. A rifleman can fire with accuracy one day and be far off target on another. Why should we ascribe any more consistency to a man with a gun (in the equivalent of combat conditions) than we would expect from a professional basketball player, whose accuracy often varies dramatically from night to night?

Moreover, we are dealing with Oswald. He could be hysterical on one occasion and, on another, the coolest man in the room. The distance between his best and worst performance in almost all of his activities is enacted over a wide spectrum. The real question is not whether Oswald had the skills to bring

off the deed, but whether he had the soul of a killer. Yet, the formulation is too simple. It could be said that everybody alive is, potentially, under sufficient stress, a murderer, a suicide, or capable of both. Phrased more closely, the question becomes: Would Oswald, pushed to such an extreme, have the soul of a killer?

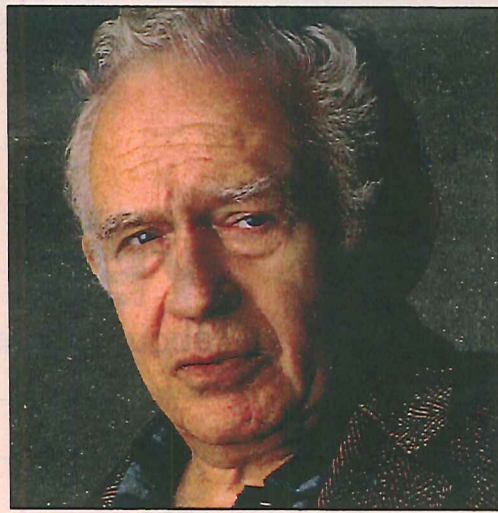
We know a great deal about Oswald by now. Assuming that the facts chosen by the author have been salient—a sizable assumption when dealing with Lee Harvey—it is still difficult not to believe that he pulled the trigger.

Despite every personal inclination to find Oswald innocent or, at least, part of a conspiracy, the gloomy verdict is that he had the character to kill Kennedy and that he probably did it alone. This conclusion now stated, one must

rush to add that a good lawyer in a trial venue outside of Dallas might well have gotten him off—ridicule of the "magic bullet" would have drilled many a hole through the body of evidence amassed by the prosecution. Besides, no one can be certain that our protagonist was not only the killer but also was alone. The odds in favor of one's personal conclusion can be no better than, let us say, three out of four that he is definitively guilty and the sole actor in the assassination.

Too much is still unknown about CIA and FBI involvement with Oswald to offer any greater conviction.

There are, for example, other possibilities to be remarked upon. While one is certainly not going to enter the near-impenetrable controversy in acoustics that would prove or disprove whether



Lee Harvey Oswald (top), shown in custody after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, is the subject of a new study by the author Norman Mailer (above).



at the assassin who became our "First Ghost."

Haunts Us More?

a fourth shot was fired from the grassy knoll—delineation of character, not exposition of sound-wave charts is the aim of this work!—one would not be surprised that if there was, indeed, another shot, it was not necessarily fired by a conspirator of Oswald's. Such a gun could have belonged to another lone killer or to a conspirator working for a group unattached to Lee Harvey. It is not inconceivable that two gunmen with wholly separate purposes both fired in the same lacerated few seconds of time.

All the same, none of that conflicts with the premise that Oswald—so far as he knew—was a lone gunman. Every insight we have gained of him suggests the solitary nature of his act. Besides, it is too difficult, no matter how one searches for a viable scenario, to believe that others could have chosen him

JFK as, relatively speaking, a good President, and he liked him. Or so he professed. Given Oswald's reflexive impulse to lie at the drop of a hat, one could question whether he was not paying lip service precisely to conceal any

he probably did like Kennedy as much as he could approve of a conventional politician but that, finally, such sentiments had very little to do with his act. He would not be shooting at Kennedy because he liked him or disliked him—

he would have seen it, a superior dedication, and the potential to develop the character of a man like Lenin. If we know that he had none of Lenin's capacity to achieve large goals both philosophically and organizationally, Oswald did hold an equally intense belief in that fabulous end which would justify all his quotidian means. His deepest despair had to arise in those moments when he could not see himself any longer as a major protagonist in the forging of a new world.

The odds are that Oswald's political ideology had finally come to rest in the live nerve of nihilism—things had to get vastly worse before they could get better. We can refer ourselves back to a note he wrote on Holland-America Line stationery even as he may have been returning from his stay in the Soviet Union to America:

I wonder what would happen if someone would stand up and say he was utterly opposed not only to the governments, but to the people, to the entire land and complete foundation of his society.

Kennedy had the ability to give hope to the American ethos. He was not, as American Presidents went, a bad President; therefore, he was too good. As Oswald saw it, the world was in crisis, and the social need was to create a new kind of society. Otherwise, the malignant effects of capitalism, added to the Soviet degradation of communism, were going to reduce people to the point where they lost all will to create a better world.

An explosion at the heart of the American establishment's complacency would be exactly the shock therapy needed to awaken the world.

It is doubtful that Oswald wanted to debate such a question with himself. He may well have possessed an instinct that told him he had to do something enormous and do it quickly, do it for his own physical well-being. The murderer kills in order to cure himself—which is why murder is properly repudiated. It is the most selfish of acts.

Back in March, he had said in a letter to his brother, Robert Oswald, "It's always better to take advantage of your chances as they come along."

continues

Right: Oswald hands out pro-Castro leaflets in New Orleans on Aug. 16, 1963. Below: President and Mrs. Kennedy in the motorcade in Dallas moments before JFK's assassination.



O'Connor/Black Star



The Bettmann Archive

As Oswald saw it, an explosion at the heart of the American establishment's complacency would be exactly the shock therapy needed to awaken the world.

that would be irrelevant to the depth of his deed.

The question has then shifted. Recognizing that we speak of it as a likelihood that Oswald is guilty rather than as a found conclusion, what then, if he was guilty, happened to be the real intent of his deed?

The answer speaks out of our understanding of him: It was the largest opportunity he had ever been offered.

The assassination of a President would be seismographic in its effect. For Americans, the after-shocks would not cease for the rest of the century. Yet he would also be punishing the Russians and the Cubans. They would suffer side effects for decades to come. But then, he was above capitalism and he was above communism. Both! He had, as

to be the rifleman in a conspiracy.

We are back then, to the last question: Why did Oswald choose Kennedy?

Every account of his sentiments by every witness who recalls his occasional remarks about Jack Kennedy agrees—that rarest of phenomena for evidence! There is whole consensus that he saw

hint, especially to his wife, Marina, that he had such a project of assassination already in his mind. Given the absence, however, of any opportunity in Dallas or New Orleans to be close enough to the throne to commit such an act until the last couple of weeks in November, the more reasonable assumption is that


enough to void interest in every large idea he wished to introduce. By killing Tippit, he had wrecked his grand plan to be one of the oracles of history.

It may never have occurred to Oswald that the obfuscation and paranoia which followed the assassination of Kennedy would contribute immensely to the sludge and smog of the world's spirit.

Oswald may never have read Emerson, but the following passage from the essay "Heroism" gives us luminous insight into what had to be Oswald's opinion of himself as he sat on the sixth floor waiting for the Kennedy motorcade—he was committing himself to the most heroic deed of which he was capable.

Self-trust is the essence of heroism. It is the state of the soul at war, and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents. [Heroism is] scornful of petty calculations and scornful of being scorned. It persists; it is of an undaunted boldness and of a fortitude not to be wearied out. Its jest is the littleness of common life. [Heroism] works in contradiction to the voice of mankind and in contradiction, for a time, to the voice of the great and good. Heroism is obedience to a secret impulse of an individual's character. Now to no other man can wisdom appear as it does to him, for every man must be supposed to see a little farther on his own proper path than anyone else [so] every heroic act measures itself by its contempt of some external good...

It would have wounded Oswald to the quick if he had known that history would not see him as a hero but as an anti-hero. He went off to work that last morning, leaving the dregs of instant coffee in a plastic cup, and in two days he ascended to the top of the list of our national obsessions—he became our First Ghost.

Oswald owned all the elements that cohere in a ghost—ambition, deceit, a sense of mission, and the untold frustration of an abrupt death just as a long-held dream of personal prominence was about to unfold. Can there be any American of our century who, having failed to gain stature while he was alive, now haunts us more? 

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USA Today Feb. 6, 1995

L.A. spinning in O.J.'s orbit

LOS ANGELES — The place to be. As tempers in the **O.J. Simpson** trial rose last week, so did the temperatures. As I write, it's in the 80s. . . . Simpson signed copies of his *I Want to Tell You* for distribution to friends and all the letter writers whose mail appeared in the book. **Larry Schiller**, who wrote *I Want to Tell You* with O.J., will have another hit on his hands when *Oswald's Tale* is published in the spring. This is the true story of a KGB agent who tells all about what Russia did inside the United States. As he did for *The Executioner's Song*, Schiller did the interviews; **Norman Mailer** did the writing. This one will be short for Norman, fewer than 900 pages.

Allen Schwartz, owner of A.B.S. clothing stores and one of O.J. and Nicole Simpson's closest friends, had a 50th birthday party at his home in Brentwood Jan. 28. It was a black-tie affair. The crowd of more than 130 consisted mostly of friends and neighbors of the Simpsons. All the people there loved Nicole and hope O.J. isn't the killer. Put yourself in their places: close friends of two people and one is accused of murdering the other.

At the party there was no discussion of the case. In fact, it may be the *only* place in Los Angeles where there has been no discussion of the case. . . . O.J.'s pal **A.C.**

Cowlings was there and so, too, was **Skip Taft**, O.J.'s business manager. Lawyer **Robert Shapiro** showed up in a wild gray tux. Many friends stood up to offer their best to the birthday boy. Shapiro's closing line was: "One of our friends is not here tonight. But he will be here for the 51st birthday."

On that same night, **Carl Douglas**, the young partner of **Johnnie Cochran Jr.** who had apologized to the court for failing to turn over discovery information to the prosecution, was honored by the trial lawyers of Los Angeles. Douglas was named lawyer of the year in a big dinner at the Beverly Wilshire hotel. (More on Simpson, 4A)

More L.A. news . . . **Gary Stevens**, one of the top West Coast jockeys, is in Hong Kong, where he plans to ride the rest of the year. He's going through a divorce back home and thought it best to remove some pressure. . . . By the way, the hot jockey out here is **David Flores**. Remember that name.

I passed a restaurant on Fairfax Boulevard called **Kosher Nostra**. Only in L.A., gang. . . . **Rush Limbaugh's** listeners probably were not surprised by Congressman **Bob Dornan's** outburst on the floor of the House of Representatives (he noted that **Bill Clinton** had demonstrated against the Vietnam War while at Oxford University and accused him of giving "aid and comfort to the enemy"). The California Republican substitutes for Rush and has said much the same thing many times on his radio program.

Had **Barbra Streisand** inked a concert deal in Japan, her opening night would have been the day of the earthquake in Kobe. This from **Marty Erlichman**, Streisand's longtime business manager. Does Barbra know something we don't know?

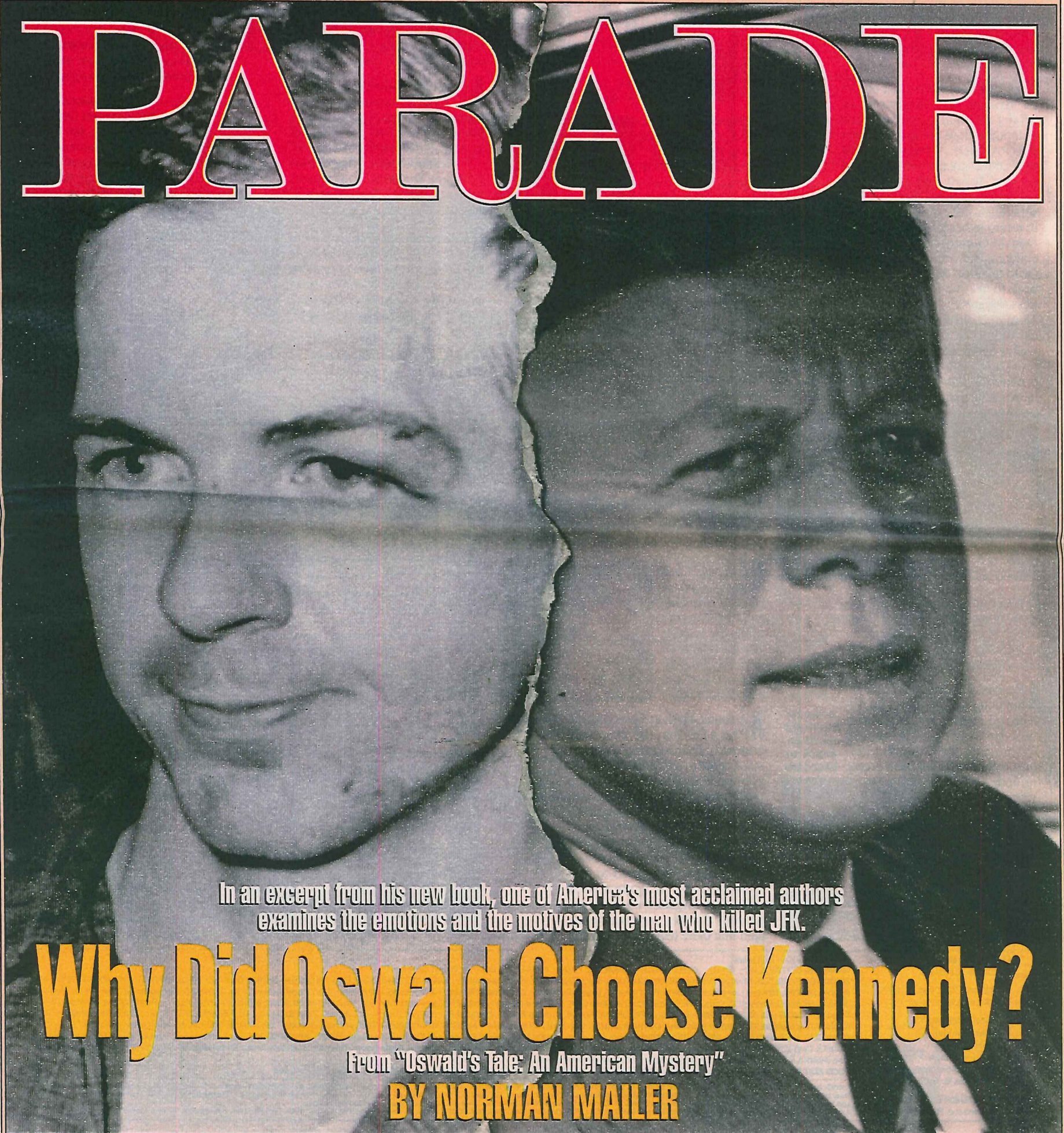


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THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

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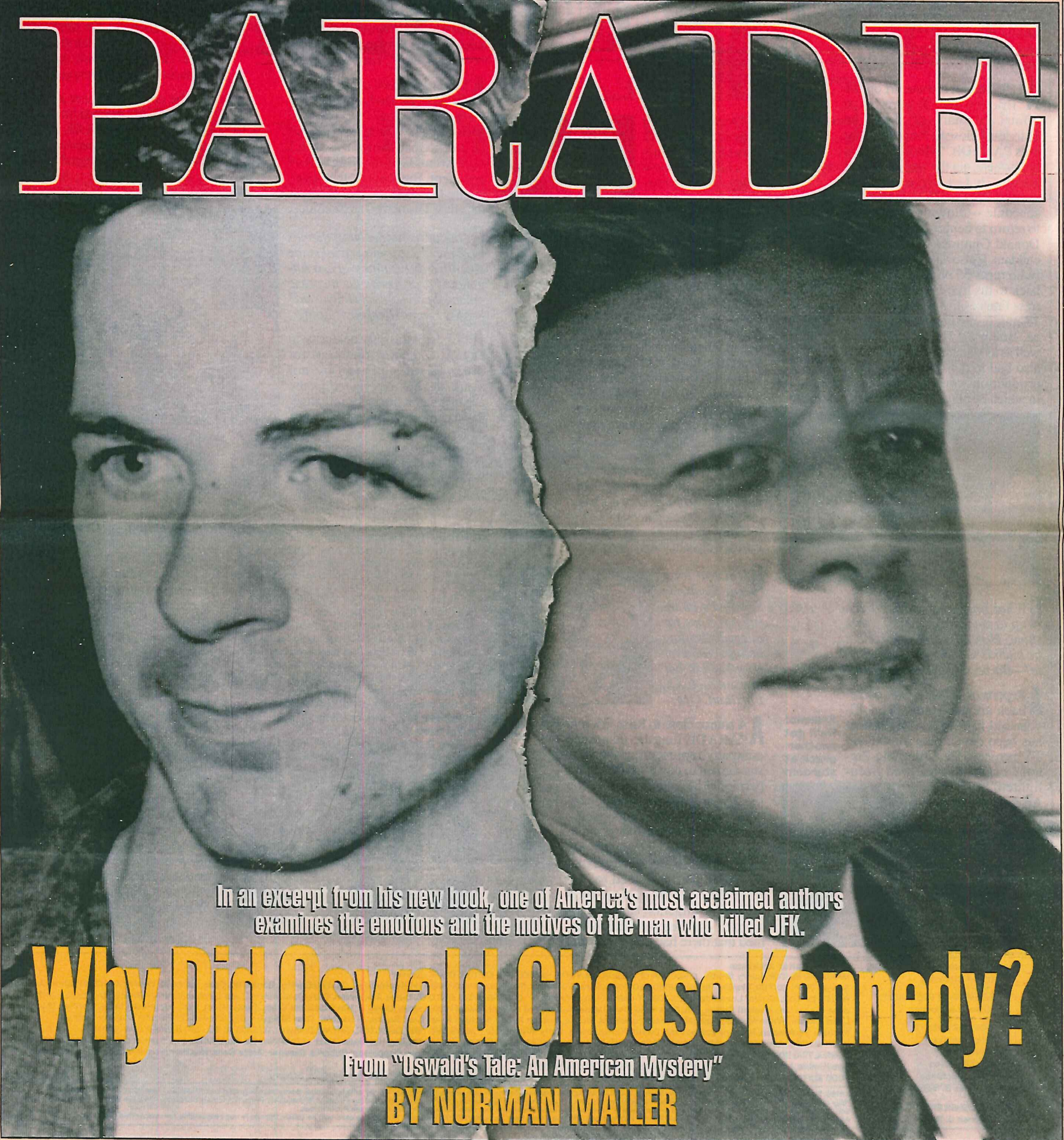
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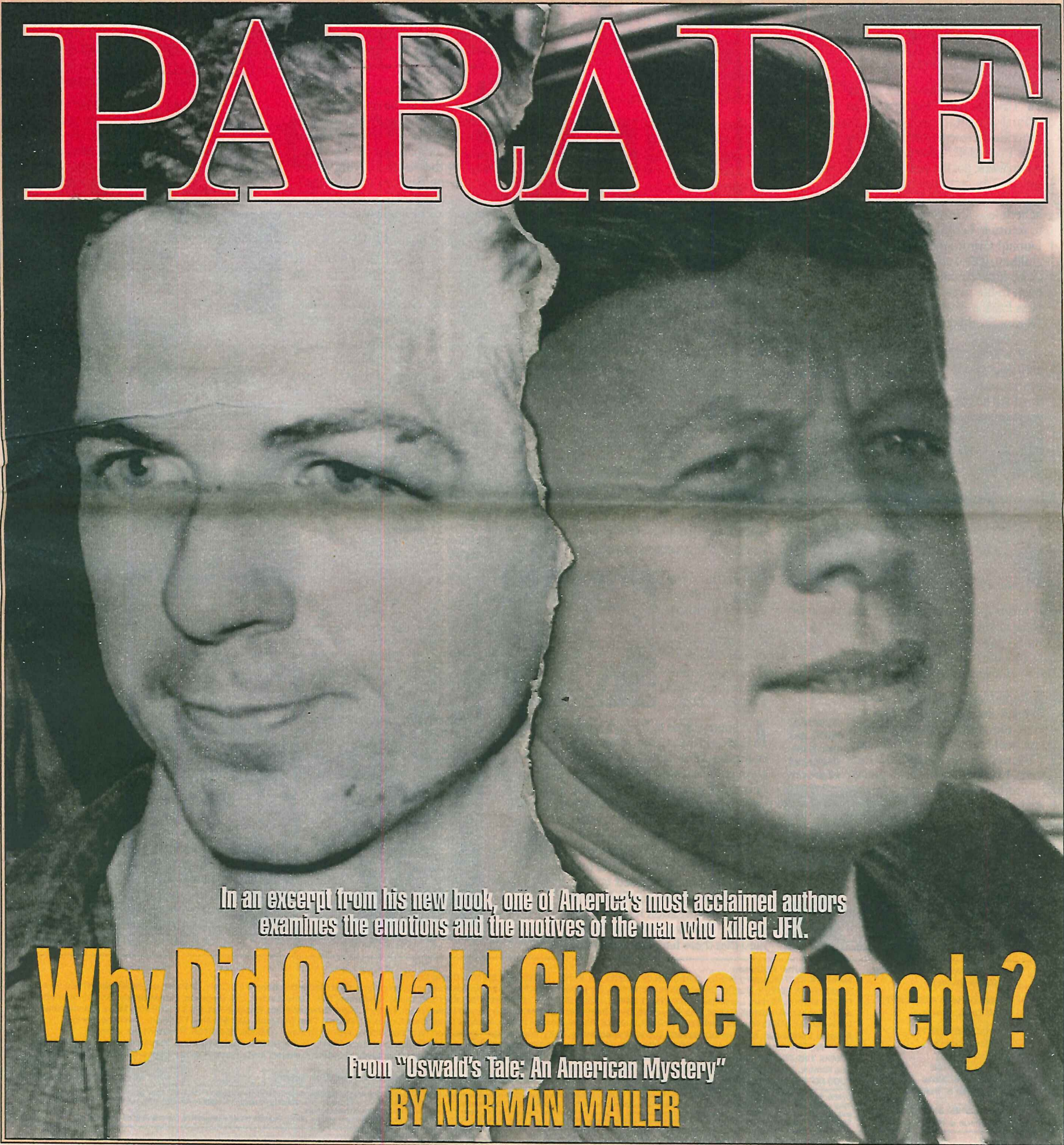
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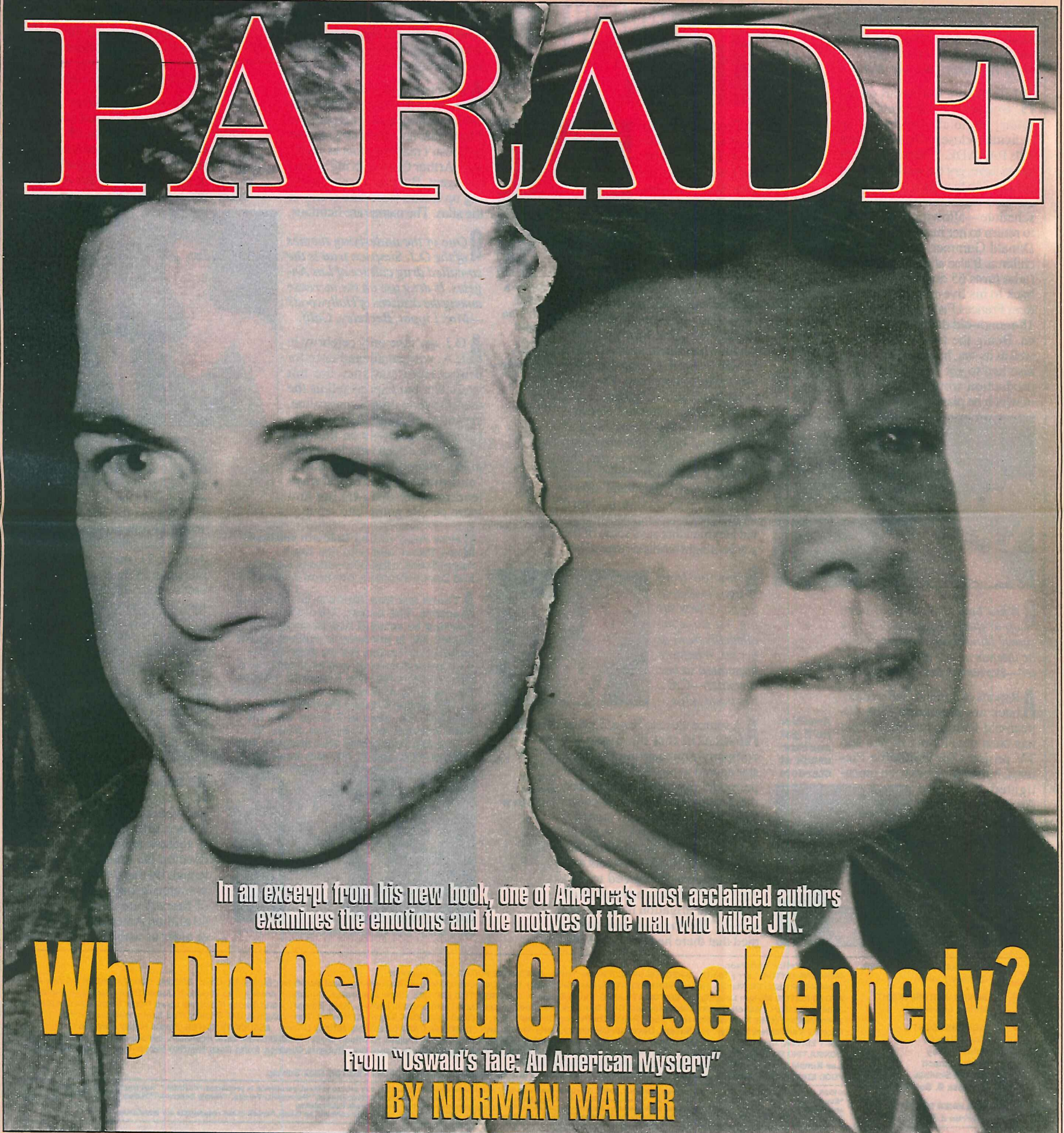
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