

# The Scavengers

by Richard Warren Lewis

## A Rush for Dollars

"It is shocking to me that in the backlash of tragedy, journalistic scavengers such as Mark Lane attempt to impugn the motives of these [Warren Commission] members individually, cast doubts upon the Commission as a whole and question the credibility of the government itself. I think it's time that we pause and reflect on who these individuals are rather than calling for a further investigation of the assassination which . . . is neither warranted, justified or desirable."

—Texas Gov. John B. Connally Jr.

... was ringing as indefatigable Mark Lane entered his 17th-floor quarters in the Biltmore Hotel. He carried the new French soft cover edition of *Rush to Judgment*, the troubling blast he had single-handedly promoted to the top of the best-seller lists. During the previous three months he had logged 285 appearances—on television and radio, in book and department stores and at lectures on college campuses—a relentless hard-sell campaign missing since the heyday of Hadacol.

Not only had his incessant attacks on the conclusions of the Warren Commission agitated the American public, but statements he had made in 14 European countries were largely responsible for the prevalent feeling that President John F. Kennedy had been the victim of a conspiracy. His charges were the same, whether he was speaking in Cleveland or Copenhagen. The president had been shot by at least two assassins. There were five shots fired, not three. The fatal bullets came from the front, from behind a wooden fence on top of a grassy knoll. Autopsy reports were altered. The Commission doctored photographs. Contrary evidence was suppressed to support a preconceived case against Oswald as the lone assassin. Witnesses were harassed. Statements were distorted. Oswald would never have been convicted in a court of law.

A quasi-documentary film produced by Lane, also called *Rush to Judgment*, was scheduled for release this month. It had been completed at a cost of \$60,000 and already recouped two-thirds of that investment in a single airing on BBC television plus much more in European movie theaters. The two-and-a-half-hour production attempted to further discredit the government's case.

Lane had just vid

- Tolson
- DeLoach
- Mohr
- Wick
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Felt
- Gale
- Rosen
- Sullivan
- Tavel
- Trotter
- Tele. Room
- Holmes
- Gandy

Article in NY Times 1-22-67

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

6/10/67  
5-1-67

- The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_
- Times Herald \_\_\_\_\_
- The Washington Daily News \_\_\_\_\_
- The Evening Star (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_
- The Sunday Star (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_
- Daily News (New York) \_\_\_\_\_
- Sunday News (New York) \_\_\_\_\_
- New York Post \_\_\_\_\_
- The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_
- World Journal Tribune (New York) \_\_\_\_\_
- The Sun (Baltimore) \_\_\_\_\_
- The Worker \_\_\_\_\_
- The New Leader \_\_\_\_\_
- The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_
- The National Observer \_\_\_\_\_
- People's World \_\_\_\_\_
- Date \_\_\_\_\_

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taped a device with William F. Buckley and was busy arranging bookings on the lucrative circuit. His stoop shoulders slumped and his nasal Brooklyn voice rasped as he confirmed another engagement on the phone. "I never see my sister and my parents any more," he said, wearily. "I'm just about ready to retire from the field." Small chance. After 15 years of fruitless muckraking, he had finally stumbled upon an issue that galvanized the mass imagination. His means of profiting on the tragedy in Dallas, however, was far more sophisticated than the fan magazines using Jacqueline Kennedy as a cover girl or the novelty shops hawking plastic busts of the late president or the vendors of picture post cards showing the fatal motorcade route superimposed on an air view of Dealey Plaza.

Lane was offering an easily digestible panacea to an incredulous audience still reeling from the wreckage of November 22-24, 1963. And he was succeeding with the hoary gimmicks of the professional huckster—distortion, innuendo, conjecture, allusion and even sheer fantasy. "There's an old legend about frogs jumping from the mouth of a perfidious man, every time he speaks," observes Professor Wesley J. Liebler, one of the Warren Commission staffers. "These frogs leap out and you have to run in all directions to grab them. It's just incredible to listen to him. If he talks for five minutes it takes an hour to straighten out the record."

Lane was not a lone frog croaking at the encyclopedic evidence amassed by the most painstaking murder investigation in history. His suspicions had helped inspire a keening pack of speculators to storm the National Archives in Washington, searching for new answers among recently declassified documents. Second-guessers included a dozen dedicated assassination buffs regularly manufacturing explosive charges. Among the more vigorous critics were:

*Harold Weisberg*, a Maryland waterfowl breeder and dethroned National Barbecue Cooking Champion. "The Commission says nothing that can be credited except 'The president is dead,'" he declares. "Oswald couldn't possibly have killed anybody. I'm the first to have said it and I'm the first to have proved it." The cumbersome trivia in his self-published first book, *Whitewash*, was based solely on his combing of the Warren Report and its accompanying 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits. His second book, *Whitewash II*, stems from his readings of material in the National Archives. "My book proves how the FBI and the Secret Service framed the whole thing," he says. Weisberg has completed a rough draft of what might become his third book—*Oscar, The Human Goose*—the saga of Oscar H. Pumpnickel, an animal whom Weisberg feeds from his own mouth.

*Penn Jones Jr.*, the editor and publisher of a Texas weekly newspaper. In *Forgive My Grief*, a volume which sells for \$2.95 up to \$10, depending on the binding, Jones exposes a sinister plot determined to eradicate key figures in the assassination's aftermath. So far, he claims, there have been 18 mysterious deaths. "Oswald didn't kill anybody," he adds. "He's too poor a shot. Hell, they wouldn't hire a man like that to be firing a rifle when they're trying to kill the president. They're going to hire the best guns they can get. He might hit somebody. Oswald was just a patsy."

*George C. Thomson*, Glendale, California swimming engineer. Thomson has grossed thousands selling transcripts of 13 radio broadcasts and a brochure called "The Quest For Truth." Their contents: Kennedy was not present in the Dallas motorcade and therefore not shot; Kennedy was impersonated by Officer J. D. Tippit; Oswald was not shot in the Dallas jailhouse garage. Thomson wails that millions of dollars are being spent to silence his findings.

*Barbara Garson*, a former member of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California (Berkeley). Her contemporary parody of *Macbeth*, a play called *MacBird*, describes the power struggle following a plot to kill the president. A privately published version of the play has sold over 120,000 copies and will soon be produced off-Broadway. Her husband, Marvin Garson, lived in the rooming house once occupied by Oswald while working as a secret agent for Lane. Much of his research has been assimilated in his wife's play.

*Vincent Salandria*, a crewcut Philadelphia lawyer who has haunted the National Archives to study motion picture footage of the assassination frame by frame. His comments and sketches in *Liberation* magazine and *Minority of One* reveal ballistic evidence contrary to that presented by the Commission. By super-imposing critical frames on top of each other, he suggests that the president's head lurched backward and to the left. Such conclusions would clearly indicate the presence of a second assassin. But Salandria, like most skeptics, overlooks the forward rush of the motorcade following the impact of the fatal bullet—a movement which clearly destroys his supposition. "Lee Harvey Oswald was framed by evidence that was obviously planted," he says. "More than one gunman fired at President John F. Kennedy ... in a ... concentrated and synchronized crossfire."

*Raymond Marcus*, a Los Angeles distributor of "Apartment For Rent" and "Beware of Dog" signs. Marcus enlarged inch-square segments of assassination photographs, which originally appeared in *Life* magazine, to eight times their original size. He distributed these blowups among fellow sleuths to prove that the first bullet hit the president substantially before the moment indicated by the Warren Commission, thereby implying the possibility of a second assassin. Marcus also disputes the *Life* magazine cover photograph of Oswald which appeared February 21, 1964. He claims it was a fabrication, that the shadows beneath Oswald's nose are inconsistent with those cast by a rifle extended in his left hand. To justify this charge, he journeyed to Los Angeles' skid row and paid several alcoholics to impersonate Oswald, while he snapped similar photographs. Penn Jones recently published 1,000 copies of a Marcus monograph, "The Bastard Bullet," which insists that the bullet found on Governor Connally's stretcher, purported to have passed through the bodies of both the president and the governor, was planted.

*David Lifton*, candidate for a master's degree in engineering at U.C.L.A. He has yet to complete a master's thesis. Instead, he has compiled maps of Dealey Plaza in Dallas which indicate the location of every witness to the assassination. He is the co-author of a magazine article entitled "The Case for Three Assassins" and has also contributed photographic exhibits to the cause which theorists interpret as proving the existence of additional assassins.

Harold Feldman, Salandria's brother-in-law, a professor of psychology and languages at a Philadelphia college. Soon after the 26 volumes of Warren Commission testimony and exhibits were published, he tallied eyewitness testimony concerning the source of bullets. The majority located the shots' origination as other than the Texas School Book Depository, a contradiction to the Warren Commission findings. Feldman, who has never visited Dallas, overlooked the acoustical refinements of Dealey Plaza, a natural echo chamber. He also placed substantial credence in the statements of Oswald's mother. "She keeps drifting in and out of paranoia," he tells friends, "but now she's not drifting out very often."

Marguerite Oswald, the mother of the assassin. She makes public appearances pleading her son's innocence, at fees ranging up to \$500. "I just got back from San Antonio and I made all the front pages," she said recently in her Fort Worth home. "There are many witnesses, but there is only one mother."

The significance of the scavengers' myriad theories is the unsettling sway they have had on public opinion. Lane likes to take most of the credit for stirring the ashes, although Edward Jay Epstein, a former Cornell University graduate student, wrote his master's thesis on the Warren Commission's methods and conclusions, and the thesis became a book called Inquest, one of the earliest critical studies of the Commission. "Six weeks following the publication of my book," Lane says, "a poll taken by Louis Harris showed that only one out of three Americans believed and accepted the conclusions of the Warren Commission."

Before he emerged as the leading assassination gadfly, Lane had made a career of championing controversial causes and underdogs, himself included. The owl-eyed, 39-year-old critic, however, never quite reached the pinnacle he has ascended since offering posthumous counsel to Oswald.

As an aggressive young attorney, he specialized in cases involving narcotic violations, alleged police graft and brutality, the rights of low-income tenants and civil liberties.

In 1961, Lane was arrested and convicted of breaching the peace in Jackson, Mississippi, where he attempted to use segregated facilities at the municipal airport. A year later, Lane was labeled a scowflaw and fined \$415 for ignoring 19 Manhattan traffic tickets dating back to 1959. That oversight triggered the wrong kind of headlines.

He won no more sympathy while picketing the Board of Higher Education offices in an effort to rescind an order banning Communists from speaking on New York City college campuses. Serving one term as a legislator in the State Assembly, he supported a resolution to abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee. It never passed.

He gained headlines in the legislature with an attack on Speaker Joseph F. Carlino, charging him with a conflict of interest after the passage of a \$100-million bomb shelter bill. An Assembly vote overwhelmingly exonerated Carlino. The lone dissenter was Lane, who was formally rebuked by a legislative committee for his unwarranted accusations.

Late in 1962, Lane announced that he would not seek re-election. Instead, he said, he would write a book and try to make a contribution to peace. He soon discovered the ideal subject. Observing telecasts of the assassination and subsequent shooting of Oswald, he became disturbed over what he termed the destruction of Oswald's rights during imprisonment. Within a month, the left-wing National Guardian printed Lane's 10,000 word, unsolicited defense brief for the assassin. An Oklahoma housewife mailed the article to Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, who quickly retained Lane as the attorney for the deceased.

On December 31, 1963, armed with a borrowed tape recorder he was unable to operate and an unfamiliar Polaroid camera, Lane made the first of his eight fact-finding missions to Dallas. "I spent my New Year's Eve reading in a small hotel room," he wrote, like a latter-day Dreyfus. "I present (sic) a rather incompetent simulated 'private eye.'"

What little insight he gained in his early investigations—mainly conversations with peripheral figures—metamorphosed into passionate talks he delivered at coffee houses and cocktail parties on both coasts. Before long, his questionable theories were expanded into a haranguing, three-hour-and-30-minute lecture titled "Who Killed Kennedy?" It was delivered for paying customers at theaters and college auditoriums and garnished with slides, enlarged photographs and the memorable vision of Lane brandishing a 6.5 caliber Mannlicher-Carcano carbine, a copy of the weapon he decided Oswald could never have accurately fired.

The seeds of doubt were more readily planted in Europe, where scavengers such as expatriate Thomas Buchanan, author of a book bearing a title identical to Lane's lecture, had already fertilized the way. Lane polished his forensic technique before sympathetic audiences in London and Paris. "There is no doubt in my mind that the Supreme Court would have reversed any conviction against Oswald," he said.

To finance Lane on the stump, a volunteer Citizens Committee of Inquiry, chaired by Lane, was established on lower Park Avenue in Manhattan. Eventually, branches were added on 40 American college campuses as well as in London and Copenhagen. The Committee coordinated his appearances at lectures and debates. One such confrontation with attorney Melvin Belli, at the Manhattan Center, attracted nearly 4,000 customers who paid up to five dollars a seat.

The Committee sold over 1,000 recordings, at \$5.95 an album, containing Lane's evasive testimony before the Warren Commission. It also purportedly paid him \$60-a-week during a particularly desperate five-week period. "I had closed down my law offices," Lane recalls. "My commitment was to investigating the case and writing a book about it. We were practically facing starvation at that point. For a year, the only time we had a steak was at Tad's Steak House in New York, which sold them for \$1.25. Once my wife and I were in London and we didn't have carefare to get us to a social engagement. We walked through the London fog for about 45 minutes."

The release of the Warren Report in September, 1964, and its 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits two months afterwards, furnished Lane with a wealth

of new targets which he assailed. *Rush to Judgment* looks at 85 colleges and universities. Additional ammunition, however tenuous, was provided by a team of investigators the Citizens Committee dispatched to Dallas to interview witnesses Lane felt the Commission had overlooked.

A British publisher finally agreed to print his book after an outline had been rejected by 15 publishers in the United States. *Rush to Judgment* sold out its first overseas edition, inspiring Lane to prepare a film version of the book. For his director, he selected Emil de Antonio, who once produced a documentary on the late Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The activities of Lane and de Antonio, in Dallas read like a bad detective story. Lane decided to use a pseudonym, Robert Blake, in his filmed and tape recorded interviews. Many participants in the film were led to believe that it was being produced for educational television. He has proudly stated, "I violated the law when I called people in Dallas. I did tape recordings over the phone without informing people. I could have been sent to jail."

The success of the book in England convinced Holt, Rinehart and Winston—ironically the same house which publishes Lane's arch-enemy, J. Edgar Hoover—to print *Judgment* in the United States. Lane experienced some frustrating moments, however, after learning that Viking Press planned to publish Epstein's master's thesis months in advance of his own book.

His anxieties prompted a bizarre skirmish at Epstein's Ithaca, New York, apartment, late one night in December, 1965. A stranger, who identified himself as English journalist Victor Benedict, burst through the front door and tried to steal Epstein's recently acquired FBI reports. He rummaged through drawers until Epstein threatened to call the police. Benedict was later identified as Ralph Schoenman, head of the London branch of Lane's Citizen's Committee of Inquiry.

"Epstein's book suffers from one weakness," Lane says today. "The statements which are attributed to the Commission members cannot be verified because Mr. Epstein refused to use a tape recorder. I offered him a hidden tape recorder, but he said he thought that would be unethical. The absence of accuracy raises serious questions." Epstein denies any such offer from Lane.

The American publication of *Rush to Judgment* in August, 1966, provoked a wide disparity of sentiments. "It will live as a classic for every serious amateur detective in America," wrote Norman Mailer. "He takes bits of evidence and magnifies them beyond their deserts," said senior Commission counsel Joseph Ball. "He exaggerates unimportant details." Ball had a press conference in Los Angeles early this month: "All of these critics are only rehashing arguments we considered and rejected over two years ago. It is scandalous to me that these men dare to infer fraud with no evidence to base it on. Their record is dishonest, a completely dishonest presentation of the evidence." TV host David Susskind accused Lane of spreading a "diabolical smoke screen."

Brazenly, Lane retaliated with fresh offerings of character assassination and innuendo. He termed the titular head of the Commission, Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren, a rational disgrace. Governor Connally's

journalistic scavenger, said Lane, was motivated by "a phone call from the [LBJ] ranch."

Attending a Lane address at the University of Oregon last month, Professor Liebeler witnessed Lane reach a new low of tastelessness. "He was talking about Jackie Kennedy's testimony," Liebeler recalls. "There's an indication in the record that some reference to the president's wounds was deleted and he said: 'Well, Mrs. Kennedy's testimony could be very useful because it appeared when she climbed out on the trunk of the automobile, she was trying to retrieve something.' And he went on to say: 'Perhaps she was trying to retrieve a part of the president's skull so she could put him back together again.' And the audience laughed. How can you possibly explain any responsible human being making a remark like that?"

Meanwhile, Lane promised to bring action in the federal courts to free classified material relating to the case. He also was instigating a petition movement to mobilize a new, public investigation.

The impact of Lane and his fellow scavengers, simultaneously, had inspired a disturbing wave of greed. One of the Warren Commission's key witnesses, H. L. Brennan, the man who saw Oswald in the window, offered a dramatic, untold story to anyone who would pay him \$2,000. An amateur motion picture photographer, Orville Nix, was asking \$200 for private screenings of a grainy, 15-second piece of film showing the fatal bullet striking the president. Even an influential Commission counsel was seeking payments for his inside observations, citing the whopping sums received by others—such as official Kennedy biographer William Manchester, who received \$665,000 for serialization rights to the book, *The Death of a President*, from *Look* magazine.

"Most of the books that have been written since the assassination can be described as garbage," declared a spokesman for the Kennedy Establishment, Malcolm Kilduff, former assistant White House press secretary. "They have been written by money-seekers who were not there in Dallas. You have a group of people here who have attempted to capitalize on the death of the president. I'm sure that someone, a couple thousand years ago, probably wrote a book doubting that it was Brutus who killed Caesar."

Some 225,000 hard-cover copies of Mark Lane's compendium of doubts were already in circulation. Nearly a million paperback versions awaited release. "*Rush to Judgment* has not just recorded history," trumpeted the newspaper advertisements. "It has made history." Never noted for his modesty, Lane went one step further. "I think," he said, "that my book has affected history. I don't think the Warren Report will survive the next six weeks."

## The Great Debate

"I've got three seniors at the U.C.L.A. Law School who have gone through Lane's book and prepared a series of memoranda describing the discrepancies they found. Close to 90 per cent of Lane's footnotes don't check out. There's either a distortion involved or a flat misrepresentation. He twists evidence out of context and often uses himself as his own expert witness."

—Prof. Wesley J. Liebeler, assistant counsel, President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy

Had the Warren Commission possessed the foresight to continue functioning after September, 1964, even in a skeleton form, the increasing groundswell of conjecture concerning its findings might have been stymied long ago. To help remedy that failure, outspoken Jim Liebler has become one of the few Commission staffers willing to tackle skeptics like Mark Lane face-to-face.

He has also been brave enough to admit that sloppiness in certain phases of what was billed as the largest, most thorough murder investigation in history has unintentionally provided the scavengers' juicy morsels on which to feed.

Many of Lane's 5,000 citations and references in *Rush to Judgment*—roughly one scattergun charge for every 2.3 seconds of reading time—hide alleged Commission neglect and error. His marksmanship in the press and on television and radio has been so deafening that often more restrained judgments have not had an opportunity to be heard.

Lane has indicated a willingness to confront any Commission representative before, any public gathering, promising to donate his share of the proceeds to the Kennedy Memorial Library. Liebler—who added to the enemy's ammunition by prematurely releasing two FBI summary reports to another skeptic, Edward Jay Epstein—insists that Lane has ducked most previously arranged meetings. Whatever, an escalating dialogue concerning the Report, its findings and the Commission's methods has evolved into today's Great Debate.

Recently, Lane secluded himself in a Manhattan hotel room, preparing for an upcoming discussion. He had removed his stylish English Mod jacket and rolled up his shirtsleeves. Occasionally, he referred to yellowing news clippings to refresh his memory. He really did not need them. Lane has repeated his charges and countercharges so often that he can stop in the middle of a sentence and resume his comments, verbatim, from the beginning.

"The strongest piece of evidence the Commission has relating Oswald to the assassination," he said, "would be the discovery of a rifle on the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building—if one could say that 1) Oswald purchased the weapon and 2) that it is, indeed, the Italian Mannlicher-Carlino which was found there. Those two steps are rather tenuous in terms of the evidence at the present time."

Liebler emphatically disagrees. "The FBI traced that rifle to Klein's Sporting Goods in Chicago," he says. "They found the order and the records of the transaction by which Oswald purchased the rifle right in the middle of a long microfilm strip. The order was in his handwriting. The rifle had his palmprints on it and the bullets that were found in the limousine and in the hospital were fired from that rifle, to the exclusion of all other rifles. Now, Oswald was there in that building that day and he had the opportunity to be on the sixth floor and it was perfectly clear from eyewitnesses that the shots were fired from that area. That was corroborated by the autopsy report. There was no other explanation of where Oswald was at the time."

One of Lane's most frequent allegations states that the Commission pursued a presupposed case. "There is no question that the Warren Commission approached this matter with the preconception that it

was necessary to do to the American people and to the people of the world that Oswald was the assassin and that he acted alone," says Lane. "That was the government's commitment to the national tranquility from the outset. I don't think it's possible to say that the Commission ever considered a two-assassin theory."

House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford was one of the members of the Commission. "We had no preconceived idea as to whether one or more individuals were involved," he says. "We had an assignment from President Johnson to get the facts and come up with conclusions as to the person or persons who committed the assassination. When we concluded, we were unanimous in the recommendation that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin. We found no evidence indicating a conspiracy, foreign or domestic."

Lane consistently attacks the least convincing Commission conclusion, the single-bullet theory. "One of the Commission lawyers came up with the most imaginative theory," says Lane, "that a bullet entered the back of the president's neck, exited his throat, ripping out his Adam's apple. The bullet then continued on to strike Governor Connally in the back, exit from his chest, shattering his fifth rib. It then went on to fracture Governor Connally's right wrist and strike him in his left thigh, remaining almost pure and pristine with less than three grains of metal missing from it—although the doctor who treated Governor Connally estimated that it appeared that there were more than three grains of metal remaining in his right wrist alone after the collision with the bullet."

Assistant counsel Arlen Spector, currently the Philadelphia district attorney, is generally acknowledged as the father of the single bullet theory. "The tests performed indicate that after the bullet would go through a substance similar to the president's neck," he says, "it would be in perfect condition with perhaps a slight amount of wobble. The tests performed on anesthetized goats suggest that a bullet . . . would sustain the amount of metallic deposit in the governor's wrist and a small piece of metal in the thigh. This is completely consistent with the metallic substance which was lost by the bullet. The most precise estimates which could be given were those advanced by Dr. Gregory, the orthopedic surgeon who operated on Governor Connally's wrist. He testified that the deposits in the wrist would have to be weighed in micrograms, the equivalent of a postage stamp."

In *Rush to Judgment*, Lane accuses the Commission of leading witnesses to give appropriate answers. He implies that staff members patronized three Negro witnesses who heard the sniper's fire directly above them in the School Book Depository Building. "[Bonnie Ray Williams, James Jarman Jr. and Harold Norman] were questioned by Commission counsel who addressed them as 'boys,'" he wrote. "It is not unreasonable to conclude that many forces combined to impose on their testimony a uniform fidelity to the official view."

Recalls Harold Norman: "I don't think the Commission looked down to me. I think they were wonderful. They didn't try to cross you up or anything. They just came directly and spoke to you. I think they gave me all the respect that a man could ask for."

The source of the shots in Dealey Plaza, a triangular-shaped echo chamber, is an area of wide disagreement, even among the scavengers. "The fifth shot, the fatal shot, was fired from the right front and struck the president in the head and drove a portion of his skull backward and to the left into the street where it was witnessed by one spectator, Charles Brehm," says Lane. "It's incredible that the Warren Commission failed to question Mr. Brehm. Brehm told me that he saw the effect of the bullet on the president's head, that he saw a substance which may have been a piece of skull, he said, but a substance fly from the president's head, backwards and to the left into the street near where he was standing. I think, rather clearly, that at least that shot came from the right front of the limousine—which would locate it as behind the wooden fence, not from the School Book Depository."

Charles Brehm, a Dallas furniture salesman, disputes key portions of the statements Lane has attributed to him. "I did see something fly to the left of the car and down into the street," he explains. "But I couldn't positively identify it and I don't want to go on record as identifying it. It would be foolish of me to say that this was a part of the skull when I don't know. On several occasions, Lane has added his own quotation marks to my statements, indicating that I said: '... indicates that the fatal shot came from a right front area, not from behind the limousine.' At no time did I indicate where those shots came from. If I live to be a thousand, I won't be able to say exactly what direction that thing I saw went, because of the movement of the car."

Lane continues undaunted: "The American people now do not understand why the facts have not been presented to them. They are less reassured now than they would have been by a truthful report. There is no doubt in my mind that the Supreme Court would have reversed any conviction against Oswald."

Liebeler offers further insight into Lane. "If you listen to the way he talks and the way he shades meanings," he says, "it's just incredible to watch him if you really know what the facts are and see how he skirts around them. No rational person can seriously suggest that there is any doubt that Oswald was the assassin of President Kennedy. He would have been convicted in any court in the world."

The stage is set for the denouement between Liebeler and Lane. They have agreed to debate in Los Angeles on January 28. The Great Debate, however, has already engrossed most of the American public—at luncheon tables, cocktail parties and other social gatherings. "In the case of a president like Kennedy," says Liebeler, "there is so much emotional response—such feelings of guilt about his death—that the country is involved in catharsis. Maybe we have to go through something like this just to get it out of our systems."

## The Housewives Underground

"For almost three years now, there has been an unorganized, quiet network of housewives, editors and students who have the 26 volumes of evidence in their homes, go over the material, clip newspapers and correspond with one another. They have played a very important role in developing the body of dissenting information. I'm part of the network."

—Mark Lane, author, *Rush to Judgment*

The key stations on the bustling network, surprisingly, are operated by three housewives, all of them would-be Margaret Rutherfords. They possess little in common besides an obsession for refuting the 10 months of diligent probing, the examination of thousands of witnesses and the millions of words collected by the Warren Commission.

Mrs. Shirley Harris Martin, a blue-eyed mother of four, functions as the Midwestern axis of the underground. The chain-link fence guarding her brick home in Owasso, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa, surrounds a garage stuffed with newspaper and magazine articles related to the assassination.

Since February, 1964, she has driven her red Rambler compact the 300 miles to Dallas on seven different occasions. A Japanese tape recorder is customarily sewn inside her purse. She conceals a wire recorder beneath one of her armpits. Her family accompanies her, bringing cameras which have photographed every inch of Dealey Plaza, a stopwatch to retrace the timing of the fatal motorcade and notebooks in which they crosscheck the whereabouts of witnesses they feel should have been questioned by the Commission.

"Men are wonderful, but it takes a woman to do the boring work," says Mrs. Martin, whose admiration of Kennedy prompted her to convert to Catholicism. "Of all the drippy women in Tulsa, I was the only one who did go down [to Dallas]. I know the city by heart now. I could have sat around ticky-tacky like everyone else. But if some of us don't work as hard as we can, the same thing might happen again in another city, with Robert Kennedy the victim this time. I worry about the Kennedys."

It was Mrs. Martin who introduced Lane to Mrs. Marguerite Oswald by mailing the assassin's mother a copy of his unsolicited defense brief published in the *National Guardian*. "The rumors were that Oswald was going to be pinned for his psychological background as a boy of 12," she says. "Nothing sends me into such a fury. Joan of Arc heard voices at puberty. Lee Oswald was a jerk, but he was a good American boy. He got a very dirty deal."

Her admiration of Lane is just as unequivocal. She named one of the 11 stray mongrel dogs she has rescued from highways after Lane's second wife, Anne-Lise. "I won't say he took Kennedy's place," she says, "because no one could. But he's up there."

Mrs. Martin helped arrange several of Lane's filmed interviews and acted as liaison between Lane and previously untapped sources. Often, her detective work leaves much to be desired. She reports quizzing the Very Rev. Oscar Huber, pastor of the Holy Trinity Church in Dallas, who performed the last rites for

the dead president. Father Huber, according to Mrs. Martin, revealed graphic details of an entrance wound over Kennedy's left temple—evidence which, if true, would support the existence of a second assassin.

The priest denies ever meeting Mrs. Martin or having any knowledge of such a wound. "His face was covered with blood, but I saw no wounds," he says. "I did not know where he had been shot and I had no thought of looking for anything like that."

The graying Agatha Christie fan, nevertheless, conveyed her frequently misleading reports to fellow investigators and anyone she thought would listen. "When the case first started," Mrs. Martin recalls, "I was sending out 100 letters a week. I even sent one to a newspaper in Kuala Lumpur." She spent up to \$200 a month telephoning buffs like Mrs. Joseph A. Field Jr., her West Coast counterpart in Beverly Hills, California.

The wife of a stock broker, Mrs. Field employs a thinly-disguised pseudonym (Marjorie Deschamps) to conceal her activities. A vicious German Shepherd intimidates unwanted guests at her \$250,000 home, where Lane likes to float around the swimming pool between engagements. With his encouragement, Mrs. Field first compiled 30 bulging scrapbooks and numerous 50-pound file boxes of clippings and transcripts. Working with a glue-pot and oversized cardboard posters, she then constructed over 100 "panoplies"—detailed charts listing the names and movements of witnesses to the killings of Kennedy and Officer Tippit.

"The American people have been tragically deceived," says Mrs. Field. "One of the most heinous crimes in modern history remains unsolved." She maintains that the Commission pursued a preconceived case and categorically dismisses its ballistics evidence, or as she calls it: "all that argle-bargle about the rifle."

Perhaps her greatest contribution to the cause, besides her generous support of Lane prior to the publication of his book, concerns her research into "doctored photographs." The February 21, 1964, cover of *Life* magazine, showing Oswald brandishing the murder weapon in his left hand and a pistol on his hip, immediately looked suspicious to her. To prove that shadows cast in the photograph were counterfeit, she dressed her teenage son as Lee Harvey Oswald and coached him into assuming an identical position, before snapping away with her own camera.

She passed a print of this amateurish re-creation among sympathizers attending a party in her honor hosted by Mrs. Sylvia Meagher (pronounced Marr), a widow who functions as the Eastern delegate of the housewives' alliance. Edward Jay Epstein, one of those present in the West Greenwich Village apartment, took closer notice of Mrs. Meagher's furnishings. "When I saw all those books on flying saucers," he recalls, "my heart dropped." Mrs. Meagher's book, which is entitled *Subject Index to the Warren Report and Hearings and Exhibits*, costs four dollars and runs 152 pages. The publisher is Scarecrow Press.

As a World Health Organization research analyst stationed at the United Nations for nearly 20 years, Mrs. Meagher labored in virtual anonymity. The Report of the Warren Commission offered the perfect opportunity to make herself known. Almost every night and weekend for nearly a year, inspired by

Partok's *Divertimento*, laying on a phonograph, she tackled the 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits with uncommon zeal.

Since its initial press run of 1,000 copies, already sold out, Mrs. Meagher has gained added stature by reviewing books written by other scavengers and making public appearances of her own. Another one of Mrs. Meagher's pastimes is monitoring radio broadcasts. Recently, she heard attorney Louis Nizer—a staunch advocate of the Commission's findings—mistakenly refer to the first identification of the murder weapon, pronouncing it howzer instead of Mauser. She immediately contacted Lane. Within 48 hours, he was ridiculing Nizer's error in one of his speeches.

Like most assassination buffs, Mrs. Meagher has never visited Dallas nor has she interviewed anyone of significance directly related to events three years past. Despite her disturbing lack of first-hand knowledge, she is revered as the indispensable authority, "Sylvia has done the most boring work imaginable," says Mrs. Martin, "and that's to curry-comb that lousy document they call the Warren Commission hearings."

Mrs. Meagher considers herself an unsung heroine, certainly not a scavenger. "I haven't gotten a nickel from my book," she says. "Nobody ever realizes the time and the money that I've spent." Her Herculean efforts could prove financially worthwhile with the release of *Accessories After the Fact*, her first full-length book which will be published in the fall. "I think the Manchester book will have worn off a little by that time," she says. "It seems like propitious timing. It will take a lot of work."

In order to complete the book she has completely abandoned her first love, the ballet. "I don't know what to give up next," she says.

## The Lunatic Fringe

"The news media in September of 1964 capsuled the 888-page [Warren] Report. And now there are about 15 of us who are going around the country screaming that there may have been poison in that capsule."

—Penn Jones Jr.

Two thousand miles from his Texas farm, assassination buff Jones addressed a Wednesday night forum at Boston's venerable Arlington Street Church. The ivy-covered structure had never before sanctioned a revival meeting. But the inflammatory gospel recited by the stumpy, five-foot-two-inch Jones contained all the drama of the tent-and-tanbark trail.

For the many who wanted to believe that a conspiracy ordered the murder of President John F. Kennedy, Jones was the perfect messiah. He was also the prime exponent of an imaginative theory which held that 18 persons remotely connected to the events of November 22-24, 1963, had died under mysterious circumstances. "I can't prove that all of them are murders," Jones drawled. "But hell, even if just a fifth of them are what I suspect they are, then we're still in trouble."

Television and radio audiences in Washington, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Lubbock and Vancouver seemed just as spellbound by Jones as the gathered

Boston. Only the climate of down enveloping the Warren Commission findings could have brought Jones and other members of the lunatic fringe to the positions of reverence they were suddenly enjoying.

Jones had published and doggedly propagandized a book called *Forgive My Grief*. The slender volume consisted mainly of 25 columns which had first appeared among the garden club pews, luncheon menus for the Mills Elementary School and announcements of the Ellis County cotton stalk destruction deadline printed in the *Midlothian Mirror*, a four-page weekly which Jones edits and publishes.

The fertile soil had long before eroded from the upland cotton farms surrounding Midlothian, a community of 1,521 citizens named for the birthplace of a Scottish railroad engineer who made the town a whistle stop between Fort Worth and Houston late in the last century. Until Penn Jones circulated his alarmist beliefs, Midlothian had become just another 35-mile-an-hour zone on U. S. Highway 67. His crusade was putting the town back on the map.

The talk around Browning's Grocery, where three pounds of Armour's pure lard sells at a weekend special price of 69 cents, was the recent appearance of Jones on Walter Cronkite's evening news program. Their favorite son also had received numerous magazine correspondents, news reporters and European film crews. "Ain't that something when the *New York Times* has to come to the *Midlothian Mirror*?" Jones chuckled, slapping the bony knee which protruded from a hole in his green fatigues.

All the fanfare, of course, had immeasurably aided the sales of his book. He had sold 12,000 copies alone over the counter in the dusty *Mirror* offices, whose walls were decorated with three portraits of the late president adjacent to two larger posters commemorating other Jones heroes—Batman and Robin.

Jones was also offering a limited, numbered edition of 500 quarter-leather volumes for \$10 apiece. They were autographed by the author and assigned whatever number the customer desired. Number 313, corresponding to the frame of movie film showing the president's skull being shattered by the fatal bullet, proved a particular favorite. Back orders were piled beneath a paperweight which read: "FEAR," a close approximation of the Jones philosophy.

Trans tucked into the pockets of his windbreaker, the 52-year-old editor scuttled towards his white frame house on West Avenue F two blocks away. There was a day's growth of gray stubble on his elfish face and a pint of bourbon stuck in his hip pocket. "Don't think that Big Daddy walks around like this all the time," he said, after removing his shoes and socks and telescoping himself into an overstuffed armchair. "This is just my Neiman-Marcus country editor's outfit." He proceeded to pour out equal amounts of bourbon and assassination theory.

"Well, of course, I loved John Kennedy," he began, pointing towards a bust of the president. "I had driven by the assassination site not more than 20 minutes before and thought: 'My God, this would be a good place to watch the parade.' When I came home, I cried for a few days. I just couldn't believe it from the beginning. But then, Sunday morning, when Ruby killed Oswald hell, from then on I've been convinced that something is deeply wrong. Then I started tying

together these murders or strange deaths, as I call them."

The motley list compiled by Jones includes: the man who ran Oswald's rooming house (heart attack), the husband of one of Ruby's waitresses (knifed death), Ruby's first lawyer (heart attack), two reporters who covered the events in Dallas (strangulation; fatal shooting) and a railroad man who witnessed the assassination (auto accident). Now it surely includes Jack Ruby himself (cancer).

It also mentions Dorothy Kilgallen, apparently the only reporter allowed a private interview with Ruby after his arrest, and William Whaley, the cab driver who picked up Oswald after he shot the president. Whaley died in a head-on automobile collision with a woman driving on the wrong side of the road.

"What is that woman?" asks Edward Jay Epstein, author of *Inquest*. "Some kind of kamikaze pilot who committed suicide in order to kill a taxi driver in downtown Dallas? I heard Penn Jones say at the Arlington Street Church that this could happen to all of us, that we must apprehend this gang of post-assassin assassins. He talks about the death of Little Lynn Carlin. She never died. She testified to the Warren Commission three months after he reported she was shot-gunned to death. He had the wrong girl. Some of his deaths aren't even connected with the assassination in any possible manner."

Jones nonchalantly shrugs off such skepticism. "Hell, if the American people want the answers, they can get the answers," he says. "I've been saying that if we had a modern computer with an honest programmer and fed it the 26 volumes and the work that I and Epstein and Lane and Weisberg and Maggie Field have done—if we didn't then have the answers, then I certainly believe the computer could direct us in the most appropriate channels to continue investigating."

Meanwhile, against the unlikely prospect that such a study will ever be made, Jones peddles his own private opinion of who killed the president. "I honestly believe that Lyndon had it done," he says.

There are other quaint demonologists on the lunatic fringe, ranging from George C. Thomson, a California engineer who emphatically states that the president was never murdered in the Dallas motorcade, to Harold Weisberg, a Maryland poultryman whose charges of conspiracy are less specific. The master of the 14.3 acre Coq d'Or Farm in Hyattstown, Weisberg is a retired journalist who had published nothing in two decades prior to the release of *Whitewash*, a poorly mounted attack on the Warren Commission which he published himself.

He had probably been best known as the National Barbecuing Champion. His wife once reigned as the National Chicken Cooking Champion. "I got the Peace Corps its first good publicity break with a project that was entirely 100-per cent mine," the mustachioed fowl expert declares. "It was called *Geese for Peace*. Geese can convert waste into protein. A goose is the only person (sic) in the world who can survive on leaves and grass."



Since the publication of the Warren Report, Weisberg has survived by debunking its authoritative conclusions. "Their own best evidence proves they are wrong in everything they say," he says. "The thing that struck me most about the Report was that it was a monstrous evasion. Oswald couldn't possibly have killed anybody. He was not *persona non grata* to the FBI. They had a bird in the hand and they didn't feel like beating the bushes. Nobody has yet shown me an error of fact in any of my work."

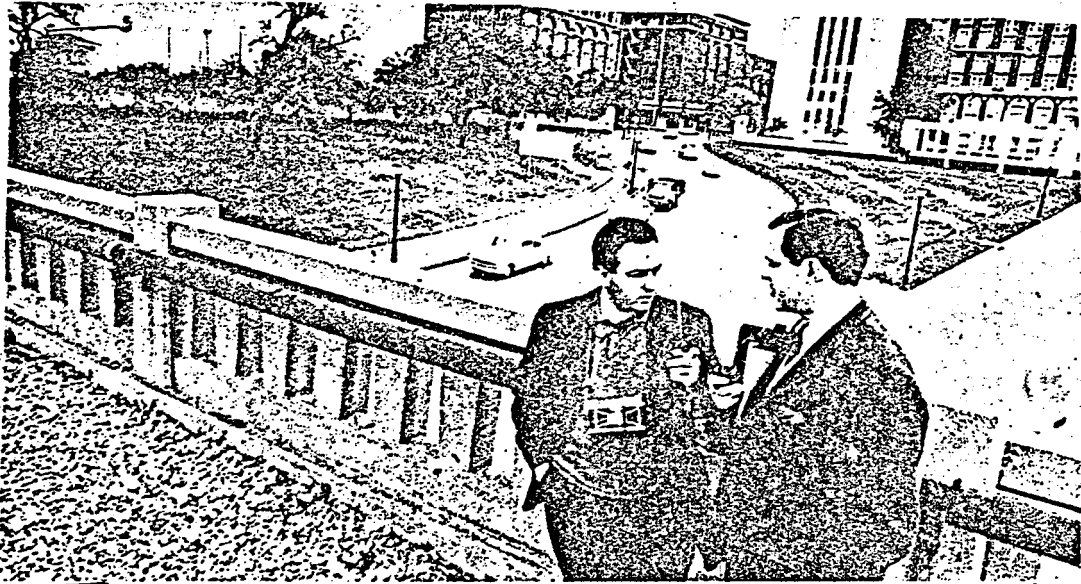
Errors and misinterpretation of facts abound both in *Whitewash* and its successor, *Whitewash II*, particularly in Weisberg's careless analysis of available photographic evidence. Typical are his opinions regarding one version of the motion picture film of the assassination which is on display at the National Archives in Washington, D. C. Since four frames have been unaccountably edited from this print, Weisberg assumes that they show something contradictory to the official findings. He suggests that members of the Commission were misled into viewing the edited version in merely a cursory manner. Yet the missing frames, which add nothing to the body of evidence, have been painstakingly witnessed by every member of the Commission and its staff, in slow-motion, fast-motion and stop-action.

Weisberg is also afflicted by an increasing paranoia regarding competing scavengers. "I'm the only one with conclusions in my book," he wails. "Others have used my conclusions in their radio and television appearances. Mark Lane is converting his grassy knoll thing into a property, in a very irresponsible way. I have it in my book. I was the first."

He seeks solace from his imagined adversaries among the waterfowl he breeds at the Coq d'Or Farm. "My wild geese come when I call them," he says. "I've built their faith in me to the point where they bring their young the day after the young are hatched. The federal experts see it and don't believe it can happen. They eat right from my hand." And incredibly enough, there are people who are doing the same thing.

Dallas police officer holds aloft alleged murder weapon.





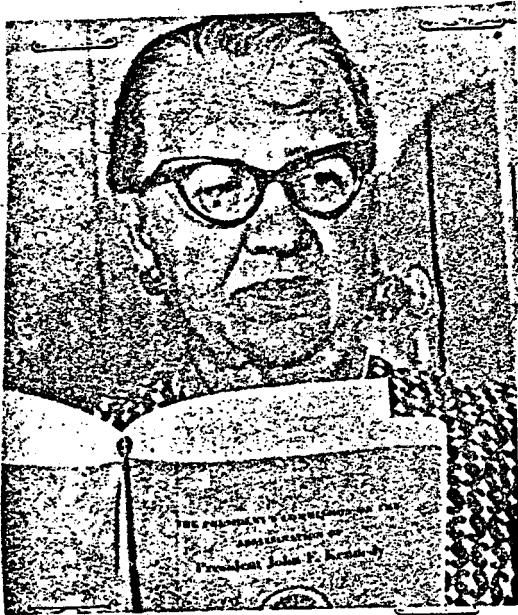
*Laurence Schiller, left, and Richard Warren Lewis, who prepared this article, overlook Dealey Plaza.*



*Charles F. Brehm, eyewitness.*



*Mark Lane, top, and Lee Harvey Oswald.*



*Marguerite Oswald examines Warren Report.*



*Alleged assassin Oswald denies guilt as he is led away by Dallas police.*





*Penn Jones Jr., editor of "Midlothian Mirror."*



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