

## A Portrait of an Assassin---

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**BY ROBERT R. KIRSCH**  
Times Book Editor

Almost prophetically, Thomas Wolfe had written: "Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the lobe that ended yesterday in Texas.

"The seed of our destruction will blossom in the desert, the alexin of our cure grows by a mountain rock . . . Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years. The minute winning days like flies buzz home to death, and every moment is a window on all time."

Another man once wrote: "I wonder what would happen if somebody was to stand up and say he was utterly opposed not only to governments, but to the people, to the entire land and complete foundations of his society." That man was named Lee Harvey Oswald.

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Rep. Gerald R. Ford, member of the Warren Commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy, and his special assistant, John E. Stiles, have written **PORTRAIT OF AN ASSASSIN** (Simon & Schuster: \$6.95), a searching and detailed biography of the man found responsible for the murder of the President and the Dallas policeman, J. D. Tippit, and a narrative of the commission's activities as seen by member Ford.

At the outset, it must be said that the level of style and research is first-rate. Carefully and perceptively,

ly, the materials of this biography and memoir are brought together to form a cohesive portrait. As the author suggests, the lengthy depositions and transcripts of the investigations and hearings provide the new material of what they call, aptly, "a non-fiction novel."

That is what it is. An effort, credible and even frightening, to record on paper the man Oswald, his life, and the explosive factors which erupted that November day in Dallas.

What is set at rest is the notion that Oswald was part of a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, that the plan was carefully made. The narrative suggests a long chain of "ifs" any one of which might have saved the life of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The earliest date Oswald could have known the President's exact route past the depository was Nov. 19.

The word "fate" is used to describe the confluence of factors which produced the assassination.

But Oswald himself was like a land mine, set and ready to be triggered. We are given the experience and qualities which produced this destructive human mechanism. The authors know well that explanation is not the same as rationalization. But the fearful thing is that not only was an Oswald produced but that similar factors may be at work producing similar types.

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Oswald's family life, his marital life, his frustrations and his inhibitions, his alienation, his political proclivities were not unique to the man. Indeed, if the assassination were subtracted from this narration, it would be the ordinariness of the man

which would be most apparent.

It is the act which translated this loner into history. Then, Ford and Stiles can point out that Oswald's act was not the product of "an addled head." He was no lunatic in the accepted sense of that word. It was his heart that was addled as well.

"In his life he had no meaningful human relationships," the authors point out. "He murdered a man whose life was full of 'meaningful human relationships,' a man who, in the eyes of the American public, symbolized affection for his fellow men."

It was this void which drove him to join radical movements, to seek dramatic methods to establish some sort of identity. But it was not simple economic deprivation, but another sort of hunger which

turned him toward resentment of every sort of authority, which made him collect grievances, which alienated him from every community in which he had lived.

We have to understand the combination of indulgence and bitterness which produced a Lee Harvey Oswald. This book is an important contribution toward that understanding. *EVD*