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THE ASSASSINATION

The Phantasmagoria

In Los Angeles, bookstores hawk posters, buttons and bumper stickers that ask WHO MURDERED KENNEDY. In Brussels, theatergoers are packing a new play, *Dallas, 22 November 1963, 12:27 p.m.*, in which right-wingers and Dallas police frame Lee Harvey Oswald for John Kennedy's assassination. In publications from *Esquire* to *Commentary*, college professors, journalists, novelists and would-be hawkshaws are fallaciously stepping on each other's lines to find new ways to challenge the Warren Commission's conclusions, investigatory technique, language, logic, legal methodology and moral intent.

The Warren Report, issued more than two years ago after a ten-month in-

FRED MC DARRAH



ATTORNEY LANE

Instinct for the capillaries.

Investigation into the killing, said flatly that Lee Oswald—alone—shot Kennedy, wounded Texas Governor John Connally, murdered a policeman and was, in turn, shot dead by Jack Ruby, whom it pictured as a demented loner. The report was widely praised at first—but no longer. The discrepancies—real or imagined—surrounding the assassination have become an increasingly obsessive topic the world over.

Amateur Sherlocks. Recently, *Pittsburgh Courier* Lou Harris found that no less than 54% of all Americans now think the commission left "a lot of unanswered questions about who killed Kennedy." A sizable number of people are so concerned that they have in effect turned the quest for the "real assassin" into an evangelistic vocation. Self-appointed investigators are at work throughout the nation, hoping to trip over some

bypassed piece of evidence that will crack the case wide open. They pore endlessly over the 10,400,000 words contained in the commission's report and 26-volume collection of testimony and exhibits. (The Government Printing Office has sold 1,820 sets at \$76

each, plus 145,266 copies of the report itself.) Amateur Sherlocks have besieged the National Archives with requests to see the President's autopsy X rays and photographs recently acquired from the Kennedys, even though the family ruled unequivocally that for five years the material would be available only to certified Government investigative agencies or private investigators approved by the Kennedys.

Minutiae & Half Truths. For cocktail party dissenters, as well as the burgeoning cult of parlor detectives, the chief stimulant has been an outpouring of critical books on the subject. The biggest seller of all (110,000 copies) is Attorney Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment*, which in effect is a defense brief for Oswald. Actually, the author admits: "My book is not an objective analysis; I've never said that I believe Oswald did it or did not do it. I say that had Oswald faced trial, he would not have been convicted."

Like most of the current crop, Lane's book is essentially a staggering accumulation of minutiae and half-truths based on minutiae. Yale Law Professor Alexander Bickel, himself a critic of the commission, has dismissed Lane's opus as "demagogical and indiscriminate."

cluded: "Great trial lawyers, like great detectives, have an instinct for the jugular; Mr. Lane has an instinct for the capillaries."

Fact & Fantasy. In all the verbiage expended on the Warren Report and the assassination, an incredible variety of hypotheses—and "facts" to make them true—has been tossed out to support contentions that Lee Oswald was innocent or in league with another rifleman or the dupe of sinister powers. In its December issue, *Esquire* rounds up 35 theories about the whos, whys, whats and hows of the assassination.

Mark Lane—and others— theorize that Kennedy was shot from a grassy knoll in front of the motorcade, that Oswald's 6.5-mm. Italian rifle was planted in the Book Depository sniper's nest to frame him, that Jack Ruby was part of a widespread plot to eliminate Oswald before he squealed, that slain Patrolman J. D. Tippit was likely in league with the assassins, and that a bullet fired from Oswald's rifle and found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital had been

planned here by unknown conspirators.

Then there are the "Oswald Impersonator" advocates, notably Authors Léo Sauvage, Harold Weisberg and Richard Popkin, who believe that one (or more) plotter was skulking around Dallas, pretending to be Oswald in order to implicate him in the crime. There is the "Manchurian Candidate Theory," which was supported by CIA men at one point: that Oswald had been brainwashed to become an assassin during his three-year self-exile in Russia.

The "Dallas Oligarchy Theory," argued by Author Thomas Buchanan, has it that the assassination was engineered by a Texas oil millionaire who thought

Kennedy stood in his way to domination of the world petroleum market. The "Cuba-Framed Theory," proposed by Fidel Castro, holds that Oswald's activities in Fair Play for Cuba groups were faked so that, assuming he escaped, Washington would figure he had fled to Cuba, and would thus have an excuse to invade. The "Red Execution Theory," pushed by Right-Wing Intellectual Revilo P. Oliver, has it that Oswald was ordered by Moscow to shoot Kennedy because the President had been a Communist but was threatening to "turn American." The "Evil-Forces Theory," favored by Mali Foreign Minister Ousman Ba, links the death of Kennedy, Patrice Lumumba and Dag Hammarskjöld with "forces behind the U.S.-Belgian rescue operation in the Congo."

"Persuasive" Compromise. Tenuous and documentably erroneous as much of the anti-Warren Report literature is, even responsible commentators share the rising feeling that the Administration should reopen the case and clear up—once and for all—the nagging discrepancies. Their contention is simply that so many questions are being raised about certain details in the report that now there is reasonable doubt cast over nearly everything in it.

One of the thorniest points of specific controversy is the commission's "Single Bullet Theory"—the belief that one bullet from Oswald's rifle struck Kennedy in the neck, exited through his throat, then plowed on through Governor Connally's torso, smashed his right wrist and finally lodged in his left thigh.

This hypothesis was originated by a commission assistant counsel, Arlen Specter, now district attorney of Philadelphia, after Warren investigators became puzzled over the timing of Oswald's shots. After a frame-by-frame analysis of a movie film taken by a tourist named Abraham Zapruder, commissioners decided that 1.8 seconds—at most—had elapsed between Kennedy's first visible response to being hit in the neck and John Connally's first measurable reaction to a bullet striking him. The early assumption had been that the two were hit by separate shots. But since Oswald's bolt-action rifle could not

be operated any faster than once every 2.3 seconds, the commission finally adopted Specter's theory that one bullet had struck both men—even though the bullet that was supposed to have done the damage was all but unmarked.

The decision to accept the hypothesis was by no means unanimous, and there ensued what has since been described in Author Edward Jay Epstein's book *Inquest* as the "battle of the adjectives." Some commissioners wanted to say that

"convincing" evidence supported the single-bullet thesis; others thought "credible" evidence was strong enough, and a compromise was reached with the word "persuasive."

Split-Second Specifics. Even the commission's conclusion collided head-on with the testimony of a primary witness to the shooting—Governor Connally

himself. From the start, he insisted that he did not feel any impact until an instant after he heard a shot, presumably the one that struck Kennedy first, and thus could not have been wounded by the same bullet. The commission decided that he was mistaken; that he had experienced a delayed reaction to his wounds. The Governor said no more about it publicly until early this month, when LIFE prevailed upon him to review the Zapruder films to see if he might have been wrong. The commission had merely shown the Governor screenings of the Zapruder assassination film, but LIFE gave him enlargements of 168 consecutive frames covering the whole shooting episode. As Connally examined them through a magnifying glass, he spotted details he had missed



CONNALLY (WITH WIFE) RE-ENACTING SHOT
By no means unanimous.

before and recalled the specific split seconds of those shattering moments.

There is no doubt in his mind that he was right. "I know every single second of what happened in that car until I lost consciousness," he says in the current LIFE. "I recall I heard that first shot and was starting to turn to my right to see what had happened. [Then] I started to look around over my left shoulder, and somewhere in that revolution I was hit. My recollection of that time gap, the distinct separation between the shot that hit the President and the impact of the one that hit me, is as clear today as it was then."

"It's a Certainty." Connally says he has never read the Warren Report, and he refuses to join the dispute over it. "History is bigger than any individual's feelings," he explains. "I don't want to discuss any other facets of the controversy except my wounds as related to the first shot that hit the President. They talk about the one-bullet or the two-bullet theory, but as far as I'm concerned there is no 'theory.' There is my absolute knowledge, and Nellie's [Mrs. Connally] too, that one bullet caused

the President's first wound, and that an entirely separate shot struck me. It's a certainty; I'll never change my mind."

Of course, nothing Connally said added an iota of new evidence. From the start, the Warren Report pointed out that its single-bullet thesis was "not necessary to any essential findings of the commission." The critics have disagreed, contending that the thesis is the cornerstone on which the commission based its single-assassin conclusion. On the contrary, reasons Arlen Specter. Though the Zapruder film was a key to the commission's confusion about the timing of shots, Specter points out that the film is two-dimensional, and it is impossible to know—"precisely"—when Kennedy was first hit. The President, too, may have had a delayed reaction, and since scant fractions of a second are involved, there is a possibility that there was time for Oswald to shoot twice. Nevertheless, Specter argues that an even more convincing point was the fact that no bullet

was found in Kennedy's body or in the limousine. "Where, if it didn't hit Connally, did that bullet go?" asks Specter. "This is the single most compelling reason why I concluded that one bullet hit both men."

The discussion and the doubts are not likely to abate, for nearly every significant incident of that tragic day is fraught with controversy and coincidence. Even a new investigation would be committed to making its own judgments and offering its best reasoned opinions—just as the Warren Commission did—in crucial areas where no firm facts exist. Thus, lacking any new evidence, there seems little valid excuse for so dramatic a development as another full-scale inquiry.