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FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

Robert Harper,

TO: Harold Weisberg, c/ ~~Mike Powell~~, Managing Editor

FAX No: 00 1 301 662 8299

FROM: Dal McGuirk (I have no personal FAX no. but I can be reached on 9-8151188 which is the main office FAX no. at Western Springs College, Auckland, New Zealand)

DATE: 18th April 1995 (NZ)

No. OF PAGES IN TRANSMISSION: 8
(including this cover sheet)

Dear Harold,

Well, here it is! Your comments,
your criticism, your corrections,
will be eagerly awaited. I had
a glitch in my computer and "lost"
what is on pages 6 + 7, so I had
to open a new file for those
two pages, and re-do them.

BIODATA:

Dal McGurk teaches at Western Springs College where he is Head of Transition Education and he is currently National President of the Transition Education and Training Association (Aotearoa). Before taking up his present position at Western Springs College in 1989 he taught history at Hillary College for eleven years. He is the author of three books on the *Afrika Korps*, the generic title for German military units that fought in North Africa in WWII under Field Marshall Rommel. Dal's first book, Rommel's Army in Africa, published in the UK by Century Hutchinson in 1987, has to date sold 25,000 copies worldwide and was just recently signed by a German publisher.

Dal's interest in the JFK assassination goes back quite a few years but he only started to study it seriously after beginning a correspondence four years ago with the American author Harold Weisberg. Dr Weisberg is the author of eight books on the JFK assassination and was acknowledged by the FBI in open court in 1976 as knowing more about the assassination, and its investigation, than anybody in the FBI.

THE JFK ASSASSINATION: FACT AND MYTHOLOGY

Kia ora tatou! Good afternoon! I thank you for the invitation to speak at this prestigious forum. Some months ago I contacted Sheryll and James to enlist their help in getting opinions from practicing history teachers on how I could best build a level 6 and/or 7 history skills text book on this subject. The book would be one based around the idea of learning analytical historical skills using examples of primary evidence lifted from the investigation of the JFK assassination. They suggested I come to speak to you, here, and here I am.

I shall try to get through all I wish to say and still leave some time at the end for answering your questions.

I wish to explore the relationship between the factual and the mythological in what has been written on the subject of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and I would like to begin with a quick personal account of how I made the discoveries I will share with you.

Four years ago I started reading what the Auckland Public Library had on the assassination. My reading was quite indiscriminate and I took whatever I found on the shelves at the time. My interest was motivated mainly by a desire to find out who may have been behind the assassination. I read everything, including the small number of titles supporting the Warren Commission. Most books however were very critical of the official explanation of events. I soon discovered there was little agreement between authors. Most tried to point the finger at one or more possible conspirators - Cuban exiles, Castro's G2, the CIA or some out of control element in the CIA, the Mafia, the KGB, the Texas Oil Barons, a Military-Industrial grouping, a military cabal, or combinations of these.

One day I read Harold Weisberg's address in a bibliography. I recalled having seen him in the 1991 British TV documentary, "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" and I wrote to him. The extensive correspondence with Harold Weisberg that grew from that first letter was the start of a journey for me into the workings of the Warren Commission and the evidence it collected. Weisberg is one of the few authors on the assassination who has stayed strictly with evidence in the public record. His book Whitewash was the first to come out criticising the findings of the Warren Commission using its own published evidence. He deals only in fact. He offers no speculative theories as to who may have been behind the assassination. What you get when you read Weisberg's books is a very hard critical look at how the Warren Commission used the evidence available to it, and how the investigation (mostly done by the FBI) of the assassination was carried out. He exposes proof of an official cover up through an investigation meant to be a 'whitewash'.

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The titles of his books leave no doubt as to what Weisberg has to say- Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report, Whitewash II: The FBI-Secret Service Cover Up, Photographic Whitewash- Suppressed Kennedy Assassination Pictures, Whitewash, IV: JFK Assassination Transcript, Postmortem: Oswald in New Orleans- Case for Conspiracy with the CIA, Case Open: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and Never Again, which was published in the States just last month by Carroll & Graf.

So, what is mythology and what is fact, or what is real and true in all of this, and what is not? Just what is the evidence? Well, there is an enormous amount of published, and unpublished, material to work with. The President's Commission published its findings near the end of September 1964 in a 900 page volume that became known as "The Warren Report". A short time later the commission released its 26 volumes of published evidence, over 10,000,000 words. The total volume of evidence officially collected by the Warren Commission, over 300 cubic feet, was deposited in the US National Archives when the commission folded up. Since 1964 more than 900 books have been written on the subject of the JFK assassination. In this same period hundreds of thousands of once restricted documents have been released from official archives in response to actions taken by private individuals under the US Freedom of Information Act, most of these coming out of FBI records. Harold Weisberg alone obtained 250,000 pages through his FOI actions. A field of mountains of paper was created by the investigation into the JFK and Martin Luther King assassinations carried out by the House Assassinations Select Committee in the late 1970s. The recently released CIA file on Oswald, its "201" or personal file, ran to 20 linear feet and filled four filing cabinets. The total number of official documents currently being considered for release under the 1992 law by the Assassination Records Review Board runs to around 2,000,000 sheets of paper. No single human mind can hope to digest so much information spread through such a large volume of paper. And would you expect to find any definitive answers to the great mysteries of the case there anyway? No! And will this flood of records finally place all government files on the assassination out into the public domain?

If there is one single thing of great significance I have learnt through my correspondence with Harold Weisberg, it is this one simple fact, the crime was not properly investigated. Just think about that. Every piece of writing dealing with the assassination has been based on evidence that came out of an incomplete investigation. This includes the report written by the Warren Commission, especially the report of the Warren Commission.

I keep re-learning the significance of that simple fact, that the crime was not properly investigated, and I shall return to it again. We are not talking about something incomplete but within a few degrees of being complete, we are looking at a grossly incomplete and unfinished investigation, in many ways almost a non-investigation.

What I am saying is that the Warren Report and nearly every other book written on the assassination falls under the broad heading of mythology, which we all know is something synonymous with self-perpetuating popular fiction. The myth or fiction that the Warren Report tried to foist on its readers is a solution that says that Harvey Oswald was the lone unaided assassin. Every other book that has tried to identify one or more possible conspirators falls into the same hole, creating yet more mythology, because there is just no conclusive evidence to show who may have been responsible. Why this dearth of evidence? You now know the answer to that question, it was because the crime was not investigated properly! And there is evidence that points to a government policy decision being taken not to investigate the assassination other than bringing a case against Oswald.

Well, then do we go to look for facts? We need look no further than the commission's own evidence, which is full of facts, too many if anything. It is the interpretation one puts on those facts and the context around them that creates the mythology.

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How does one go about evaluating the Warren Report? Let us start with some facts relating to the Warren Commission itself. They were seven very upright and respectable men drawn from the highest ranks of the US establishment, five republicans and two (southern) democrats. [INSERT] These seven were carefully picked by Lyndon Johnson. He needed their public participation to give the report he commissioned the highest possible stamp of respectability and credibility. What did these seven think they were doing? Thanks to Harold Weisberg, who fought long and hard for access to transcripts of two important 'top secret' sessions the commission held in late January 1964, we do know something of what they talked about behind closed doors. What we find there is that they proved unable to confront the possibility there may have been a conspiracy within some part of the US Federal Government to assassinate Kennedy, and to incriminate Oswald. Let's look at these two meetings of the Commission.

Overhead Projector

The first was an emergency executive meeting called on the evening of 22nd January 1964 after the general counsel, Lee J. Rankin, had been officially advised by Waggoner Carr, the Texas Attorney General, that his client had information Oswald had been in the pay of the FBI as an undercover agent, from September 1963. Rankin also had Oswald's FBI badge number, which was 8179. You have parts of the transcript of this meeting in your handout. This was crunch time for the commission and how they responded to this information would set the direction their investigation would take. Consider the implications of the following statement by Lee Rankin, on page 6 of the transcript of this meeting:

[Hand out large name tags here for speaking parts, get audience participation:]

*

It is going to be very difficult for us to be able to establish the fact in it. I am confident that the FBI will never admit it, and I presume their records will never show it, or if their records do show it, they could think their records would show some kind of number that could be assigned to a dozen or more boxes according to how they wanted to describe them. So it seemed to me if it truly happened, Oswald would have boxes practically every place he went, and that would be an ideal way to get money to Oswald as an undercover agent, or anybody else that you wanted to do business with without any particular transaction.

At the end of the session, on pages 12 and 13, this exchange took place:

A: ... when the Chief Justice and I were just briefly reflecting on this we said if that was true and if it could be proved out and could be established, then you would have people think that there was a conspiracy to accomplish this assassination that nothing the Commission did or anybody could dissipate.

Boggs: You are so right.

Oh terrible!

The implications of this are fantastic, don't you think so?

Yes!

... have anybody admit to it, even if it was the fact, I am sure that at this point there wouldn't be anything to disprove it.

... if this were true, why would it be particularly in their interest - I could see it would be in their interest to get rid of this man but why would it be in their interest to say he is clearly the only guilty one? I mean I don't see that argument that you raise particularly shows an interest

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A: They would like us to fold up and quit.

Boggs: That closes the case, don't you see?

Dulles: Yes, I see that.

Rankin: They found the man. There is nothing more to do. The Commission supports their conclusions and we can go on home and that is the end of it.

The session finished with Dulles saying, "I think this record ought to be destroyed. Do you think we need to destroy it?"

... what happened just five days later on the afternoon of the 27th January when the commission were called into a top secret executive session. Again it is the General Counsel Lee J Rankin (page 13/139 of this transcript),

Rankin: We do have a dirty rumor that is very bad for the Commission and it is very damaging to the agencies that are involved in it and it must be wiped out insofar as it is possible to do so by this commission. So it seemed to me in the light of that the way I would treat it if I were in their position would be to have somebody approach me, tell me the problem and see what I frankly could do to clear my name if there was a way to do it and as long as the Commission didn't agree not to go any further, if they said that would not satisfy them, I don't see how the Commission would be prejudiced.

[...ING ROLES BY AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS.]

After stating that acknowledging that Hoover would not be frank with them, the Commission then agreed the right course of action was to get Hoover's assurance that Oswald had not been connected with the FBI. After that, deciding they had to talk to the Texas officials who had the information on Oswald's links with the FBI (and possibly the CIA too), as well as the reporter on the "Houston Post" who had run this story together with his source, in the end the commission did nothing. The President's Commission who had been solemnly enjoined to "leave no stone unturned in uncovering the truth" decided some things did not need to be investigated. In this they were following the precedent already set by the Hoover and the FBI.

Obviously do not have time to go further into evidence either not used or misused by the Commission, but includes some sensational material- there is the matter of the so-called magic bullet, a projectile that did not obey the laws of physics or logic or even common sense, there is the president's autopsy, performed at the US Naval Medical Centre at Bethesda in Maryland that raised more questions than it answered, and required the autopsy surgeon to commit perjury before the commission, there is the possibility Oswald may have had connections with one or more US intelligence agencies, the investigation by the Dallas P.D. of the Tippitt murder, which it charged Oswald with committing, the evidence at the assassination scene, Dealey Plaza and the Texas School Depository Building, the fragmentary scraps of information relating to Oswald's twelve hours of interrogation gleaned from the testimony of those who were present in the Dallas Police Department (did you know no record of any of these interrogations?), the way Oswald's odd relationship with the State Department was handled, unanswered questions about Oswald's time in Russia, and so on and on.

any more I should add to this list?

I can't see these

Another set of papers in your handout is a guide to the mass of evidence generated by the Warren Commission, Publications of the Warren Commission, by Professor David Wrone. This is a most important document. A basic knowledge of what is in the Commission's evidence is a must for anybody wishing to go beyond what is in the report. A reinterpretation of some key points of the commission's findings, based solely on its own evidence, is a logical first step in re-appraising the Warren Report. This is where I

think the idea of a text book along the lines I have suggested would have a place in teaching senior secondary school history.

If there was an almost non-investigation of the assassination, then what was investigated? What is the subject matter of all those hundreds of thousands of sheets of paper? In one word, the answer is "Oswald". That was the main object of the investigation, Lee Harvey Oswald, and it became so relatively soon after the assassination too. Within hours of the assassination the Dallas Police were announcing to the world that they had 'the man who done it'. Days later the FBI took over the investigation and within a couple of weeks they too were able to complete a report that left no doubt Oswald was the assassin. When the Warren Commission started its official hearings, in early March 1964, their very first witness was Marina Oswald. What do you suppose she knew about the assassination?

Answer
Kidd

Among your handout material you have two draft outlines for the commission's final report, the first dated 11th January 1964 as proposed by the Chairman, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and the second dated 26th March 1964 and written by Norman Redlich, assistant to the General Counsel. Both memoranda show the extent to which the commission's plans for investigating had become fixated around Oswald, to the exclusion of any leads not connected with Oswald, and this started before the investigation was even under way.

Now, to look at my idea of putting material for a text book together. I think it could be written for either level 6 or level 7 students. I know from the couple of times I have taken classes at Western Springs through some of this evidence their level of interest has always been exceptionally high. The JFK Assassination has been called 'the crime of the century' and it is still unsolved.

It is also topical. I have collected a sample of recent news items clipped from 'The NZ Herald' and the 'Sunday Times' which you will find in your handout. There are often items on TV news and foreign affairs programmes that either relate directly to the assassination or touch on related issues that you would want to record.

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I think the main practical value in taking a course such as this lies in the ability it imparts to students of being able to RECONSTRUCT what happened using a good range of primary evidence. Having done this exercise in historical RECONSTRUCTION students can then test their conclusions against what the Warren Commission concluded.

In correspondence with Professor David Wrono of the University of Wisconsin, and Professor Gerald McKnight of Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, both have stressed to me that they teach the assassination and its aftermath within the context of larger moral and political issues of 20th Century Civilisation- the role of open democratic government, the place of basic human principles in guiding our behaviour, what is at stake when a government (as happened here) investigates itself, and what a citizen's response should be in these circumstances, and so on. Having given this matter some thought, I agree. I think it would be wrong to teach the JFK Assassination separated from its significance set against a larger historical picture. The assassination was a pivotal point in world history. Students should know why.

Without having to labour connections with other contemporary events, several issues that faced the Kennedy presidency routinely come up in studying the assassination. These could be highlighted to students, such as, the Cold War, Vietnam, race relations and Black Rights, the arms race, the fight against organised crime, Castro and Cuba, and so on.

I think there could be a fostering of many useful skills students could develop taking this course, such as:

- a. an ability to read and understand official reports, or to read 'officialese' and look for nuances of meaning, e.g. Hoover's memoranda on NAA results,
- b. an understanding of the rules of evidence as should be practiced by police forces,
- c. building and using a specialised vocabulary (see handout for examples),
- d. map reading (taking a street map of Dallas and plotting the route of Kennedy's motorcade and following Oswald's movements as described by the Warren Report, and checking time and distance calculations,
- e. building on existing science-related knowledge, such as studying aspects of evidence such as photographic analysis, neutron activation analysis, forensic pathology, ballistics, film analysis
- f. role-play, with students taking the parts of members of the commission during the secret sessions of 26th and 27th January, or in reading the testimony of important witnesses like Abraham Zapruder,
- g. constructing a biography from information abstracted from published sources, say for Oswald,
- h. debating brain teasers, for example looking for imaginative solutions to problems like how to explain why the empty shells allegedly taken from Oswald's revolver did not match up with the bullets allegedly removed from J.D. Tippitt's body
- i. creating a filing system to store and retrieve information recorded during the course.

I think the course would lend itself well to personal research, possible topics being things like:

- the competence or otherwise of the Dallas Police Department investigation
- the importance of the 'single bullet' theory to the Commission's findings
- the autopsy, flaws and contradictions
- Oswald and the feat of a master marksman (ballistics too)
- placing Oswald on the 6th floor of the TSB (testimony of Charles Givens and others)
- the paper bag, a critical look at evidence connecting it to Oswald and the Mannlicher Carcano
- JFK's policy options for Vietnam in 1963

By way of re-iteration, I come back again to my subject, fact and mythology. The official mythology is official version which is official fact. This mythology states that Oswald was the lone left wing nut assassin. The official mythology also holds that the crime was investigated. This is the position the US government still holds to be true today. If you doubt me, write to the US Embassy and see.

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A further aspect of mythology is the work of what has been called the "assassination industry", authors making an income and a name for themselves by solving "cold" cases. Publishers and the news media support this industry by promoting the sale of uninformed assassination literature.

The facts are not in dispute. It is only the use, or misuse, of the facts that has created a situation where the president of the United States was assassinated, 32 years ago, and we still cannot say who did it. The evidence that was collected very clearly showed Oswald was not the assassin. Other evidence also points to an official cover up by the US Federal Government. There I rest my case.

I suppose I have really tried to issue you with a challenge. If you did not know at least some of the things I have referred to today, why not? This is not meant as criticism, it is a simple question. Do you think as history teachers we should be better informed on this subject? If your answer to that question is "yes" then it seems obvious to me certain things must be done. There needs to be more support by university libraries and by some of the more affluent colleges to buy the microfilm sets of ex-Jackie David Wilson's lists in his publication. Bookshops must be encouraged to buy stocks of books by authors such as Harold Weisberg, Sylvia Meagher, and John Newman. And schools should look at teaching this topic in their senior classes.

Please remember to fill out the questionnaire tucked at the end of your hard copy, and either give it to me or mail it back to me later.

Now I am ready to take any questions. Thank you.

Simmons

PS: The questionnaire is not done yet. I'll post it when it has been drafted!

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