

Overview

An Inside History of the Warren Commission: Its Origins, Workings, and Outcomes (working title) is the first comprehensive, scholarly work that examines the inner workings of the Warren Commission's investigation into the assassination of John F. Kennedy from its conception through the complete investigative timeline, closure, and subsequent scrutiny.

Based on primary source research involving the inspection of more than 250,000 pages of government documents, acquired through the Freedom of Information Act, from the Warren Commission, FBI*, Secret Service, Justice Department and the CIA, the book presents evidence and analysis meant to address the lingering national questions: Are the content and conclusions in the Warren Commission Report credible? Did the Commission undertake a truly good faith, thorough and controlled investigation, or did politics infiltrate the investigative process? Were the Commission's conclusions shaped by the way the Commission was formed, its methodology, the actions and priorities of key participants and politics?

The book details the Commission's treatment of witnesses, evidence and even its alteration of the public record of its own proceedings. Other highlights unique to this book include a detailing of the influence of LBJ, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Acting Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach on the Commission's processes, inconsistencies in the medico-legal facts incorporated into the official findings in the Warren Report, and the suppression of Senator Richard B. Russell's dissent.

* A unique feature of this book that allowed me to examine more than a quarter of a million pages of documents was the use of the FBI's Dallas Field Office Index. Since the Bureau was the investigative arm of the Commission, the Dallas office (the office of origin of the crime) established an index of keywords and names that were regarded as pertinent to the investigation. This Index, that I have on CD-ROM, allowed me to access in just minutes any of the 35,000 FBI records pertaining to the investigation. Without this research engine I doubt I would have ever undertaken this project. As far as I am aware this is the first work on the Commission and the JFK assassination that has ever used the Dallas Index. My suspicion is that all previous researchers were unaware that the Index existed.

Book Outline, Chapter Summaries

Chapter One:

Relying exclusively on government documents this chapter reveals that the basic decisions concerning the "official truth" of Dallas—that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin, there was no conspiracy—were decided over the assassination weekend in a series of Sunday (11/24) phone conversations between President Lyndon Johnson, FBI Director Hoover, and Acting Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach.

In these conversations, tape-recorded by LBJ, the new president strongly signaled that he wanted the case closed fast—to restore public confidence.

Chapter Two:

- Discusses the domestic and foreign policy pressures that forced LBJ to accede, to what he initially strenuously opposed, the creation of the Warren Commission to investigate and report on the JFK assassination.
- How and why Hoover sabotaged Chief Justice Earl Warren's choice of Warren Olney for the post of Commission general counsel for his own man, J. Lee Rankin. (Hoover and Rankin were on a first-name "Lee" and "Edgar" basis). How Hoover's interference in blocking Olney critically affected the work of the Commission.
- Congressman Gerald Ford's role as the FBI's secret informer on the Commission.
- FBI's leaking to "cooperative" news media the results of its 833-page report on the JFK assassination before the report was sent to the White House and the Commission. The purpose of the leaking was to box in the Commission and force it to endorse the "official truth" agreed upon by LBJ, Katzenbach and Hoover. This blunt stratagem was not lost on the Commission.

Chapter Three:

- Despite suspicious events and untoward developments, the Commission concluded that Oswald's trip to Mexico a month before the assassination had no bearing on the subsequent events in Dallas.
- Using FBI and CIA documents this chapter raises still unanswered questions and explores lingering dark areas surrounding the assassination. Not the least of these, for example, is the revelation that someone was impersonating Oswald while he was in Mexico City. This "false" Oswald (still unidentified) was visiting and making phone calls to the Soviet and Cuban consulates in Oswald's name in what can only be interpreted as an attempt to link Oswald with a Kremlin-Havana plot to assassinate JFK when no connection existed. This book is the first full-length attempt to open this Pandora's box.

Chapter Four:

- Deals with the Commission's stunned reaction to the FBI report on the assassination. Katzenbach's assurances that the report was the end product of an "exhaustive investigation" would ring hollow once the Commission had the report in hand. Warren's characterization of the report as "skeletal" was the consensual view of his fellow Commissioners.
- Chapter sites some of the glaring inadequacies of the FBI Report and FBI "tender spots" in its investigation. For example, the FBI never consulted the official JFK autopsy before writing its report.
- Rankin even toyed with the idea of establishing the Commission's own independent investigative staff. When Hoover learned about this through a source on the Commission (Allen Dulles) he threatened to order his agents in the field to sit on their hands. Rankin quickly dropped the idea of an independent investigative staff.

- Very shortly, relations between the FBI and the Commission were secretly downgraded within the FBI from a “Lee” and “Edgar” status to “adversarial,” the FBI’s own characterization.

Chapters Five & Six:

- These two chapters deal in detail with the FBI and Commission’s treatment of the evidence in its prosecution case against the dead Oswald.
- Short of violating the rules of evidence and accepting corrupted witness testimony, the Commission was never able to place Oswald on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository—the so-called “sniper’s nest”—with a rifle at the time Kennedy was assassinated.
- The FBI’s laboratory’s forensic testing proved that no shot or shots could have come from the Commission’s designated “sniper’s nest.”

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Chapter Seven:

Marina Oswald, the 22-year-old widow of the accused assassin, was the Commission’s strongest witness in the government’s case against Lee Harvey Oswald.

- The purpose of this chapter is to disclose how the government abused Marina and pressured her, threatening to deport her and her two infant daughters back to the Soviet Union, if she did not “cooperate.”
- Rankin and the Commission relied on her to help them construct a convincing case to bridge the gap from allegation to verification. Or, as Rankin summarized the Commission’s task: “To tell the story and to show why it is reasonable to assume that he [Oswald] did what the Commission concludes that he did do.”
- For three months the Secret Service had Marina under protective custody and after she was released the FBI placed her under physical and electronic surveillance. The Bureau even went so far as to tap her phone and illegally bug her home.

Chapter Eight:

During January and February the Commission met three times. During these executive sessions the Commissioners were forced to confront the troubling question that could no longer be ignored: Was Oswald an agent for a U.S. government agency?

- In the end, after much discussion, the Commission adopted the Rankin solution to their quandary: They acquiesced in permitting the FBI and the CIA to investigate themselves on this “Agent Oswald” question knowing in advance that this would be a meaningless exercise in official denials.
- Two days after the assassination the CIA secretly acquired a copy of Abraham Zapruder’s historic six-foot strip of the assassination and submitted it for photo analysis by the Agency’s National Photographic Intelligence Center (NPIC). NPIC was the finest photo interpretation center in the world. The Center’s analysis of the film concluded (1) That the first shot could not have come from the so-called “sniper’s nest;” (2) that there was more than one gunman in Daley Plaza shooting at the presidential limousine. No other mainstream book on the JFK assassination has uncovered this development or discussed its suppression from the official record.

Chapter Nine:

The Commission was duty bound to establish a clear and unimpeachable record for history when it came to the JFK autopsy, the best evidence in the case. The documentary record cited in this study reveals a very different outcome.

- The original autopsy report was destroyed and a second autopsy report was written on Sunday (11/24) after the Bethesda Naval Hospital prosecutors and the admiral in charge (Admiral Galloway) learned of Oswald's murder eliminating any possibility of a trial and the testing of the evidence.
- My book compares the final autopsy report with what the government represents as the doctors' contemporaneous autopsy notes, or the data base for the report that appears in the Warren Report. The comparison reveals that almost 75% of the medico-legal facts making up the official findings in the Warren Report cannot be found in the Bethesda doctors' contemporaneous notes published in that same historic document!
- All subsequent government sponsored examinations of the JFK autopsy records—the so-called Ramsey Clark medical panel (1967). The House Select Committee on Assassinations (1979) and the Assassination Records Review Board Report (1998) either did not acknowledge this corruption of the medico-legal records or failed to provide a full satisfactory explanation for why they are missing or destroyed.
- The Commission's most obvious suppression of the medico-legal evidence was its failure to include the JFK death certificate in its 900-page Report or in the 26 volumes of Hearings and Exhibits. The two-page death certificate signed by Admiral George G. Burkley, the president's own personal physician, was intentionally suppressed because it irreparably refutes the Commission's account of the shooting and the lone assassin conclusion. Dr. Burkley was neither called as a Commission witness nor ever deposed by the FBI or the Secret Service.

Chapters Ten and Eleven:

If there is a Rosetta stone in the JFK assassination that exposes the deception of the government's investigation into the crime it is, what in time came to be referred to, as the "single-bullet" theory.

- The purpose of these two chapters is to present a detailed deconstruction of the "single-bullet" hypothesis and expose it for what it was: an ad hoc invention and politically determined fabrication to meet the Commission's requirements for a lone assassin, no conspiracy explanation for the Kennedy assassination.
- When the Commission's own medical and forensic experts, as well as Governor John Connally's own surgeons, asserted that the medical and physical evidence was inconsistent with the single bullet invention the Commission simply ignored them.

Chapter Twelve:

Inarguably, the FBI's most colossal blunder in the entire matter of the Kennedy assassination occurred before the president ever arrived in Dallas.

- By any intelligence standards, based on the FBI's information in its pre-assassination Oswald file the Bureau should have had Oswald on its Security Index (SI). All names on the FBI's SI were routinely submitted to the Secret Service before a presidential

visit to any city in the United States. The FBI failed to share its intelligence on Oswald with the Secret Service.

- This chapter deals with this monumental FBI error and the subsequent cover-up by Hoover and his Bureau elites of this inexcusable pre-assassination negligence in handling the Oswald case.

Chapter Thirteen:

When the Warren Commission Report came out it mildly criticized the FBI for failing to bring Oswald's name to the attention of the Secret Service. There was nothing in the Warren Report's detailed contention about the FBI's "unduly restrictive role in preventive intelligence" that was not already anticipated in the Bureau's own secret in-house investigation about this failure that Hoover ordered back in December 1963.

- The FBI was wrong and it knew it was wrong. Seventeen agents from assistant directors, supervisors, to street agents were secretly censured for being derelict in their responsibilities.
- There is nothing, however, in the disclosed public record to indicate whether the Hoover Bureau made any effort to learn from the Commission's justified criticism and improve itself by heeding that criticism.
- Instead, Hoover and his executive officers launched a "counterattack" on the Commission for publicly criticizing the agency. The Hoover vendetta went so far as ordering the preparation of dossiers (to dig for derogatory material) on the Commission members, Rankin, the assistant counsels, and the staff after the Report was published and the Commission disbanded.

Chapter Fourteen:

This book corrects a persistent notion in our political cultural imagination that all dissenters or critics of the Warren Report are so-called "conspiracy buffs." In actual fact, the Commission's first dissenter was a member of the Commission, Senator Richard B. Russell, Jr., one of the most conservative and respected members of the U.S. Senate.

- For the first time this book tells the story behind Russell's dissent and how unbeknownst to Russell, his dissent was suppressed from the official record to create the false impression that the Commission was unanimous in its support of the Report's conclusions.

Chapter Fifteen:

This is a short chapter revealing how in 1975 the FBI's bungling in failing to alert the Secret Service to Oswald's presence in Dallas became a coast-to-coast media sensation and how the post-Hoover FBI and the Justice Department conspired to cover-up the original cover-up.

Marketing and Competitive Analysis

Roughly there are a thousand or more books in circulation dealing with the Kennedy assassination. Most of the Kennedy assassination literature either ignores primary sources or exhibits only a superficial acquaintance with the rich repository of government documents and records that are presently in the public domain. Whatever reviewers might find to criticize *An*

Inside History of the Warren Commission, it will not be that it was written without fear and without research.

Next year will be the fortieth anniversary of the Kennedy assassination. All indicators suggest that there will be a spate of books on the assassination or works on Kennedy that speculate on the “Who” and “Why” of Dallas.

Pantheon Books has already published Thomas Mallon’s *Mrs. Paine’s Garage and the Murder of John F. Kennedy*. Kansas University Press has announced the release in time for the 40th anniversary of David Wrone’s detailed study of Abraham Zapruder and his film of the assassination, the world’s most famous amateur movie. Vincent Bugliosi has written a book defending the Warren Commission that will be released in 2003. My book, which is an in-depth criticism of the Commission and a deconstruction of its Report, could be featured as a timely rebuttal to Bugliosi.

I have learned through the grapevine that some serious writers like Richard Whalen, John Newman, and David Lifton are planning to commemorate the 40th anniversary with books on Kennedy and the assassination.

Author Biography:

I have taught at Howard University and the University of Maryland. My last 25 years in academe I taught at Hood College, a liberal arts college in Frederick, Maryland. I retired from full-time teaching as Professor Emeritus of History. Currently I am the archivist for the Harold Weisberg Archive at Hood College. The archive houses some 300,000 pages of government records on the JFK and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination. As far as I am aware it is the largest private archive on these subjects in the world. Several of us associated with the archive are working to put the entire Kennedy collection on CD-ROM.

I have had articles and book reviews published in History journals like **The Journal of Southern History, the South Atlantic Quarterly, and Mid-America**. I have been featured on ABC’s “Nightline, MSNBC, and some Canadian TV and radio programs discussing the Kennedy assassination.

A recent book of mine,

Discusses the domestic and foreign policy pressures that forced LBJ to accede, to what he initially strenuously opposed, the creation of the Warren Commission to investigate and report on the assassination. The FBI leaked to “cooperative” news media the results of its 833-page report before it was sent to the White House and the Commission. The purpose of the leaking was to box in the Commission and force it to endorse the “official truth” agreed upon by LBJ, Hoover, and Katzenbach. This blunt stratagem was not lost on the Commission.

Chapter 3:

Despite suspicious events and untoward developments, the Commission concluded that Oswald’s trip to Mexico a month before the assassination had no bearing on the subsequent events of November 22, 1963. This chapter raises still unanswered questions and lingering dark areas surrounding Oswald’s eight days in Mexico City. Recently released government documents support the conjecture that Oswald’s Mexico City trip was not inconsequential, but is a key to the Kennedy assassination.

Chapter 4:

This chapter deals with the Commission’s stunned reaction to the “skeletal” nature of the FBI’s Report on the assassination. Rankin even toyed with the idea of establishing the Commission’s own independent investigative staff. Very shortly, relations between the bureau and the Commission shifted, on Hoover’s part at least, from friendly to “adversarial.”

Chapter 5 & 6:

The two chapters cover in detail the FBI and the Commission’s treatment of the evidence in the case. Short of violating the rules of evidence and accepting tainted witness testimony, the Commission was never able to place Oswald on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository—the so-called “sniper’s nest”—with a rifle at the time Kennedy was assassinated.

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Marina Oswald, the 22-year-old widow of the accused assassin, was the Commission’s strongest witness in the government’s case against her dead husband. This chapter discloses how the government abused Marina and pressured her, threatening to deport her and her two infant children back to the Soviet Union, if she did not cooperate.

Chapter 8:

Over January and February of 1964 the Commission met three times. During these executive sessions the Commission was forced to confront the troubling question that could **no longer** be ignored: Was Oswald an “agent” or asset of an American intelligence agency? After much agonizing the Commissioners acquiesced in permitting the FBI and the CIA to investigate themselves, knowing in advance that this would be a meaningless, *pro forma* exercise in official denial.

Chapter 9:

The Commission was duty bound to try and establish a clear and unimpeachable record for history when it came to the JFK autopsy, some of the best evidence in the case. The government's documentary record cited in this chapter reveals a very different outcome: destruction of the first autopsy protocol; almost 75% of the medico-legal facts making up the official autopsy report cannot be found in the Bethesda doctors' contemporary autopsy notes published in the Warren Report; and the willful suppression of JFK's death certificate because it refuted the "official truth" of the assassination.

Chapter 10 & 11:

If there is a Rosetta stone in the JFK assassination that exposes the deception of the government's investigation into the crime it is the Commission's construction of the shooting that came to be called the "single-bullet" theory. The purpose of these two chapters is to present a detailed deconstruction of the "single-bullet" hypothesis and expose it for what it was: An ad hoc invention and politically determined fabrication to meet the Commission's preordained requirements for a lone assassin, no-conspiracy explanation for the Kennedy assassination.

Chapter 12:

Inarguably, the FBI's most colossal blunder in the entire matter of the Kennedy assassination occurred before the president ever arrived in Dallas. By any preventative intelligence standards, based on the Bureau's pre-assassination file on Oswald, the FBI should have alerted the Secret Service about Oswald before Kennedy arrived in Dallas. Neither the Secret Service nor the Dallas police ever heard of Lee Harvey Oswald before he was charged with Kennedy's murder. If the Dallas Secret Service had Oswald on its "watch list" he would have had an iron-clad alibi and could not have been charged with JFK's assassination. The chapter deals with the FBI's systematic attempts to cover-up this history-altering failure.

Chapter 13:

The Warren Commission mildly criticized the FBI for failing to bring Oswald's name to the attention of the Secret Service. The FBI was wrong and Hoover knew it was wrong. But the director and his executive officers launched a "counterattack" on the Commission for publicly chastising the agency. The Hoover vendetta went so far as ordering the preparation on dossiers (that is, to dig for derogatory material) on the Commission members, the assistant counsels, and the staff after the Warren Report was published and the Commission disbanded.

Chapter 14:

This chapter corrects a persistent notion in our political cultural imagination that all dissenters or critics of the Warren Report are "conspiracy buffs." In actual fact, the Commission's first dissenter was a member of the Commission, Senator Richard B. Russell, Jr. For the first time this book tells the story behind Russell's dissent and how unbeknownst to Russell, his dissent was suppressed from the official record in order to create the false impression that the Commission was unanimous in its support of the Report's conclusions.