

A LEGACY FOR JFK RESEARCHERS

BY GILBERT A. LEWTHWAITE

Harold Weisberg has spent the past three decades of his life pursuing the truth about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. He believes he has not found it. But he has amassed, filed and tabulated an estimated 250,000 pages of information on the case. He recently decided these to Hood College in Frederick, which will devote a special section of its new library to his archives, making them available for future researchers. Some of the papers are already at Hood while others will be sent later.

"I can't think of a private collection that comes anywhere close to this," said Hood history professor Gerald McKnight, who will direct the archives.

Mr. Weisberg, formerly a journalist, Senate investigator and Office of Strategic Services analyst, has written seven books on the case. He does not believe that Lee Harvey Oswald fired the shots that killed the president but he does not pretend to know who did. He blames the enduring mystery on what he sees as the failure of the FBI, the CIA and the Warren Commission to investigate the case properly. He has used the courts repeatedly and successfully to extract information from the government, and is recognized as an expert on the assassination.

Now 79 years old and ailing, he lives with his wife, who helps maintain his archives, on a quiet, wooded lot beside a pond outside Frederick. His basement is crammed with 60 filing cabinets and dozens of cardboard boxes, all filled with materials relating to the Kennedy case. He also has files on the slaying of Martin Luther King Jr.; they will also go to Hood College.

Q: How did you get started investigating the assassination?

A: After the president was killed, I stayed glued to the radio, carried a portable radio with me. I wasn't satisfied with much that was happening.

To begin with, I analyzed the Warren Commission report in terms of the commission's own evidence. That's been the thrust of my work ever since: what the government says

and what the evidence proves. I don't theorize conspiracies. I don't theorize solutions. My work is entirely factual.

Q: Do you think you know who killed President Kennedy?

A: I have thought about it much. Once I had a rather immature attitude to it. I thought of the old lawyer's way to approach the problem: Cui bono? Who benefits? It was a rather emotional way of solving the problem, but I was wrong. You can't solve the crime through "who benefits?" because there were so many people who could have benefited from getting rid of Kennedy and replacing him with [President Lyndon B.] Johnson. The closest I could come is telling myself certain groups, or forces, had more of an interest than others and more of a capability.

Here you have a dramatic and terribly tragic event like this. If you

want to be responsible, there are certain things you know to be fact. What you think and what you theorize has to be in conformity with these facts.

Q: If you can't solve the crime, what's the point of devoting so much time to it?

A: There is something very worthwhile in all this. First, we have a representative society. What this requires is that people be in a position to make informed decisions. It is necessary, whatever the odds against it, to try to keep government honest.

It was one of my lawsuits that led Congress to amend an act in 1974 to open up the FBI and CIA records. A large percentage of these records were originally withheld from me. Unlike others who merely filed a request and accepted what the government refused them, I litigated. It is not pleasant. It is usually unpleasant, painful and expensive.

Q: There must have been many

frustrations.

A: The most frustrating part of it was the disillusionment of it: that the society in which we lived was nothing like they were telling us it was. Yes, that was a frustration, but I adjusted to it.

Q: Has the Kennedy case become an obsession to you?

A: I do other things. I spend most of my time on that, sure. But that's true of a doctor, a lawyer. You don't think a doctor who cares about his work is obsessed.

Q: Have you seen Oliver Stone's movie "JFK"?

A: No. There are some things you don't have to see. I was given a copy of one of the copies of the script. It is a dime novel. It misleads more people than anything since the Warren Commission report.

Q: Will the truth about the Kennedy assassination ever be known?

A: I think today if an actual assassin would give the Senate a confession nobody would ever believe it. When the crime itself was never investigated, what leads are there for anyone, official or unofficial, to follow at a later date?

I have no idea who did it. I don't think I have any chance of finding out who did it, and I am not trying to. My work has become, I think historians will tell you, an in-depth study, in terms of the assassination, of how the basic institutions, of how society, worked in those times of great stress, and since then. Not one has worked.

Q: The system broke down then?

A: Oh, yes. But you also have to try to make it work. I have not solved the crime, but I have made some of the institutions work. The country understands much better some of the terrible things that happened. That, in itself, was very worthwhile, I think.

I don't regard anything of this as futile. I think it has been a success. If I balance it all out with all the limitations I had, I don't think I could reasonably have expected to do more than I have. In looking back, I wonder how I did as much as I did. ●



HAROLD WEISBERG IS LEAVING TO HOOD COLLEGE THE RESULTS OF THREE DECADES OF WORK: AN ESTIMATED 250,000 PAGES OF INFORMATION ON THE JOHN F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATION.

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