

BOOKS:

CONSPIRACIES

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**THE FINAL
ASSASSINATIONS REPORT**
Report of the Select Committee
on Assassinations,
U.S. House of Representatives
Bantam, 792pp, \$3.95

By **BRIAN McKENNA**
Special to The Gazette

On the morning of November 22, 1963, a young U.S. Justice Department lawyer named Robert Blakey was in conference with Attorney-General Robert Kennedy, hammering out another commando assault on organized crime.

At one point, Carlos Marcello, the Mafia don of New Orleans, had been kidnapped by government agents acting on Kennedy's orders, and flown swiftly to South America. An enraged Marcello snuck back into the United States and reportedly uttered an old Sicilian threat: "Livarsi na patra di la scarpa!": "Take this stone out of my shoe!" against the Kennedy brothers, promising that the president was going to be assassinated using a 'nut'.

The assassination of John Kennedy broke the back of the war on organised crime. Robert Kennedy descended into black days of terrible brooding. Blakey soon left to teach at Notre Dame. In the next 15 years, he assembled impressive credentials as an expert on organised crime.

In March of 1977, Blakey was summoned back to Washington to take the highwire job as the new Chief Counsel — the general manager — of the strife-ridden Congressional investigation into the assassinations of John Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

Now, after a sometimes harrowing two years, the House Committee has concluded that both leaders were mur-

dered as the result of a conspiracy. Its final report, plus 28 supporting volumes of evidence and testimony, is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office (Washington, D.C. 20402) for \$174.45 U.S. plus 25 per cent for foreign postage. Bantam books has also rushed out a quickie paperback version of the final report alone, which includes a thoughtful introduction by Blakey, 64 pages of poorly explained but intriguing black-and-white photos and documents, and a foreword by *New York Times* associate editor Tom Wicker.

On Nov. 22, 1963, Wicker made his reputation by reporting how the lone Lee Harvey Oswald performed a breathtaking feat of marksmanship and killed JFK with two shots from the back. He argues that the Committee has not presented a credible alternative to the Warren Commission thesis, so that even if the Warren report isn't airtight, it must be accepted. And besides, he says, "I have always thought that Oswald acted alone when he killed Kennedy (call it a stubborn refusal to face facts, if you insist)".

Dan Rather, who has fronted CBS documentaries backing up the official version of the events, told me last summer that he believes Kennedy was fired at by more than one rifleman and was the victim of a conspiracy. But he'll never say that on the air.

The report of the Select Committee on Assassinations deserves better. Even for those who know almost nothing of the assassinations, it will make compelling reading.

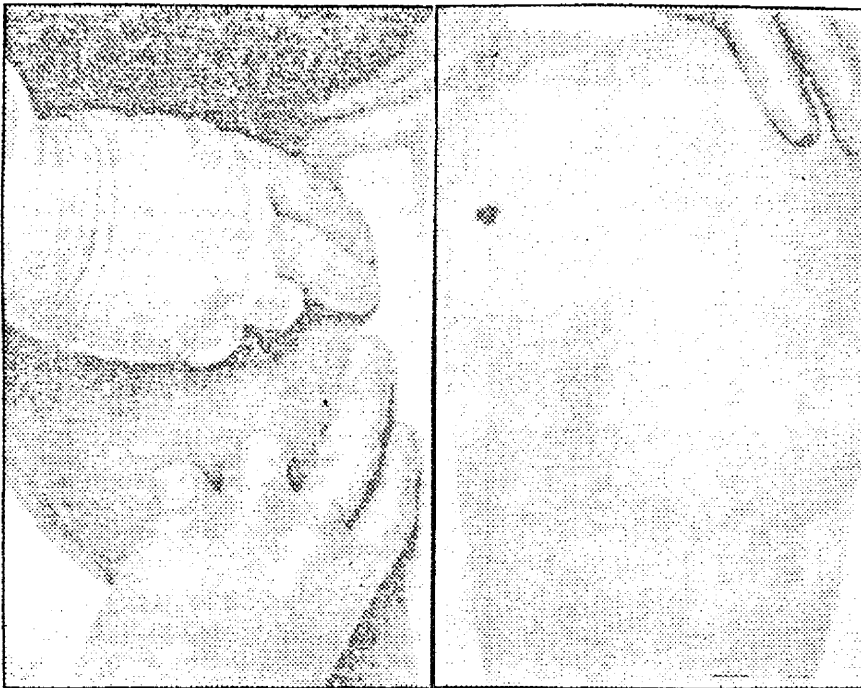
As might be expected given Blakey's background, the sections dealing with the Mafia and the Teamsters are succinctly powerful. The Committee documents how Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa, New Orleans Mafia don Carlos Marcello, Miami Mafia leader Santos

Official evidence

demolishes theories that

the assassins of Kennedy

and King acted alone



From 'The Final Assassinations Report'

Committee drawing from autopsy photo shows JFK wound

Trafficante, as well as some anti-Castro Cubans had "motive, means and opportunity" to kill the president of the United States.

Mafia connection

What was Bobby Kennedy brooding about in those long months after the assassination? The Committee discovered that he believed that Hoffa may have been part of a conspiracy, and that both he and Lyndon Johnson suspected that the Mafia had struck back at the Kennedys in the most effective way it knew how.

The Committee established that both Oswald and the man who gunned him down Mafia-style two days later, Jack Ruby, had associations with organised crime figures — in Ruby's case, right up to the day of the assassination.

Much of what the Committee presents is not new. It selectively used the massive evidence accumulated over the years by assassination researchers, sometimes giving credit, most often not.

The Committee also developed the painstaking and often brilliant work of Berkeley professor Peter Dale Scott, the former Canadian diplomat and son of Frank Scott, who was one of the first on the trail of Ruby's myriad contacts with a wide series of organised crime figures, including the nation's top Mafia hitmen.

The conspiracy thesis developed around the April 4, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King — "the most peaceful warrior of the 20th century" — is equally interesting. The Committee effectively demolishes Ray's alibi

— the mysterious Raoul — who started as "a French-Canadian with a shock of red hair", in Ray's own words, and later became a swarthy Latin.

Raoul, who Ray said hired him to do gunrunning and then framed him with the assassination, may very well be his own brother Jerry Ray, who may have financed his flight across the U.S., through Canada and finally on to England where he was arrested.

The Committee appears to be on more shaky ground when it speculates that Ray may have assassinated King in expectation of collecting \$50,000 supposedly offered for his head by a sinister group of right-wing Southerners based in St. Louis.

The Committee seems to favor this thesis over many others because it springs from its own fieldwork, but it is no more convincing than others.

Altogether, however, the Committee does a strong job of establishing the architecture of a conspiracy in both assassinations.

Its finding that a second assassin was perched on the grassy knoll firing at the president from behind a stockade fence was ingeniously arrived at by studying an audio tape inadvertently made in Dealey Plaza.

The Committee concluded that a motorcycle policeman's microphone stuck in the 'transmit' position recorded the sounds of at least four shots. The source of the sounds confirmed a second rifleman.

In 1964, the FBI determined that Oswald could not have aimed and fired his rifle in less than 2.25 to 2.3 seconds. But the evidence from the motorcycle tape showed the first two shots were only 1.66 seconds apart.

Expert marksmen performing tests for the Committee were unable to bring the time down to 1.66 seconds, even by shooting at stationary targets and using the iron sights instead of tak-

ing an extra fraction of a second focus down the telescopic sight. Desperate to make the thesis work, Blake and Deputy Counsel Gary Cornwell resorted to firing, loading, then firing again without taking the time to aim. This incredible method finally brought the time down to less than 1.66 seconds.

Eloquent dissent

That Oswald was able to hit Kennedy and wound Connally by merely pointing the rifle at them and firing, "it comes almost impossible to believe," observes Congressman Christopher Dodd in an eloquent dissent from the majority finding. Dodd believes at least two assassins fired at Kennedy, but he does not believe that Oswald was necessarily alone firing from the Texas School Book Depository. He recommends careful study of the recently-discovered Bronson film, which on pre-

liminary study seems to show more than one person in the Oswald party only minutes before the motorcade arrived.

When I met Robert Blakey near the end of his exhaustive and exhaustive task last February, he put into words what anyone who comes in contact with the assassination feels. "It's like grabbing the Tar Baby," he said. "Once you pick it up, you can never put it down. It follows you like the curse Tutenkahmen."

The House Committee honorably took the investigation into the two assassinations farther than ever before. It didn't find a smoking gun, but it did uncover enough evidence of a conspiracy to show that someone has committed an almost perfect crime — killing a president and getting away with it.

Brian McKenna has produced two reports on the JFK assassination for CBC TV's "The Fifth Estate."