

Conference Studies JFK Slaying

Interest Rises in Plot Theories

By William Claiborne

Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK, April 27 — Penn Jones Jr., a former Texas weekly newspaper publisher turned conspiracy theorist and the speaker at the concluding session of a "Politics of Assassination" conference here today, appeared unhappy with the way the program was going.

He had finished his remarks — in which he blamed the Nov. 22, 1963, death of President Kennedy on a cartel of Texas oilmen, the FBI and conservative politicians — and the next program attraction had still not arrived.

The audience of about 200 students at the New York University Law School auditorium was waiting for Robert Groden, a New York optics expert who is touring the country with a pirated print of the Zapruder film (the only color film, taken by a bystander) of the assassination.

Jones filled the gap by offering some theories and answering questions, and as Groden's tardiness continued the speaker seemed to be uncomfortably pressed into new lines of conjecture.

But he also seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of suppositions, which he shared with the audience until Groden arrived.

Jones began by saying he believed eight teams of assassins, each manned by a "gunner, assistant gunner and lookout" had participated in the assassination, and had been trained at a rifle range in Oklahoma and housed in posh living quarters that have since been "bulldozed" over.

Moreover, Jones declared, a "commanders' conference" was held in Dallas the night before the murder of the

President.

Hands shot up in the mostly young audience as several persons asked who had plotted the assassination.

"I believe (FBI Director) J. Edgar Hoover and Richard Nixon were there . . . I interviewed the man who took Nixon out there," Jones said, referring to a Texas oil millionaire's home where the plotting supposedly took place.

The pace of questioning quickened and in a span of 30 minutes Jones had told the group that Jack Ruby had been "fed cancer" in prison, that the Army's Second Armored Division "landed" in Austin, Tex., in the midst of the assassination aftermath, that the assassination plot was "hatched" at the 1960 Democratic National Convention and that Lyndon B. Johnson had participated in the plot.

Jones was then asked whether the pardon of former President Nixon by President Ford "could have anything to do with the cover-up of President Kennedy's death?"

Jones, the author of an assassination conspiracy book called "Forgive My Grief," replied that he believed Nixon was promised the presidency at the "commanders' conference" and that Mr. Ford's membership on the Warren Commission investigating the assassination was more than a coincidence.

"These boys are playing for keeps, and it's going to take an all-out effort on our part to get to them," Jones declared.

Whether the conference participants will make an "all-out effort" is unclear, but today's session reflected

a growing revival of the assassination theorists, who seem to have increased in number since the debunking of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's conspiracy case.

More than 1,000 persons attended a similar conference earlier this year in Boston, sponsored by a group called the Assassination Information Bureau.

The bureau has booked 250 campus lectures by leading assassination "researchers," and is preparing to publish a new monthly magazine dealing with political assassinations in the United States.

Also, the group sells publications and tape-recorded examinations of such topics as "the Manchurian Candidate theory," a Jack Ruby "deathbed interview" and a discussion of Cuba by Lee Harvey Oswald three months before the assassination in Dallas.

The gathering here also reflected the divergent elements within the conspiracy theorists' fraternity and occasional friction among them.

On Friday night, author-investigator Harold Weisberg stirred a controversy with a speech bitterly criticizing assassination theorists who have become "rich and famous" from the national tragedies.

In a speech read in his absence by James Lesar, lawyer for the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King Jr., James Earl Ray, Weisberg said of the Boston conference: "I can't condemn the misinforming of anyone strongly enough . . . ripping off people's pockets is bad. Ripping off trusting minds is worse."

Weisberg, author of a

book called "Whitewash," said, "I deal with fact. I have no conspiracy theories . . . If any nut, no matter how paranoid, has a nightmare, these self-styled conspiracy theorists repeat it and excite you with it. They have to excite you to get your booking and money."

Weisberg obliquely referred to Mark Lane, author of the best-selling book, "Rush to Judgment," as "one who grew rich and famous from the J.F.K. assassination."

NYU graduate Peter Brosnan said he began organizing the conference after broadcasting a series of assassination inquiry programs on the university's radio station. Brosnan said he first contacted a friend, Richard Sprague, one of the conspiratorists' photographic experts, and "after a while the word was out. I'd called researchers and they would say, 'Yeah, I've been trying to get in touch with you,'" Brosnan said.

The conference speakers were all longtime skeptics of the Warren Commission's conclusions and their presence attracted a crowd of several hundred persons, at a \$6 admission fee.

Besides Jones, Lane and Weisberg, the speakers included Dr. Cyril Wecht, Allegheny County, Pa., chief coroner, who in 1969 was permitted to study the classified autopsy record of President Kennedy; Ralph Schoenman, who along with comedian Dick Gregory recently testified before the Rockefeller commission investigating the Central Intelligence Agency and former Rep. Alard Lowenstein (D-N. Y.), who is researching the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.).