

The answers, of course, are very much in point in our age of ecumenism. For

if you start off by not believing in the *sins* of schism and heresy, you've got no reason for regarding Christian *disunity* as a notably bad thing . . . Our present desire for easy, good relations all around is, up to a point, an excellent thing. And yet, we are in some present danger of leading our Protestant neighbor up the garden path, deceiving him with illusory expectations that Catholic unity is going to change into something radically different and much easier for him. Neither truth nor charity will be served by so one-sided an effective presentation of the matter . . . Our primary task, our most necessary task is that of helping men—in all gentleness and charity—toward a condition in which the Gospel will again be audible and seem relevant . . .

Toward this 'twentieth century' and its hubristic fantasy of self-sufficiency it may be our chief duty to speak in a voice of loud, sardonic derision.

Derrick, in brief, is optimistic, as he must be, for the long run—"The Ark of Salvation . . . goes rocking and floating down the centuries, always imperfect . . . It won't sink"—and pessimistic, too, as he must be—"but in a way it's our responsibility." And that responsibility requires a turnabout in our habits of thought, our characteristic mode of viewing the Church: "At present we are extremely ready to judge and modify the Church by the world's standards but curiously reluctant to do the opposite . . . If the Gospel is to be preached, it is the 'twentieth century' that will have to be altered."

findings were to confirm them? Thus, from the outset, the possibility that the Commission could find and report the presence of such a purpose behind the assassination was excluded by the charter of the Commission's mandate, as communicated by the President to the Chief Justice.

There was a further restriction on the Commission: It is obvious that even before the staff had learned of the Presidential mandate, events had foreclosed all means of squelching the rumors, except one: the Commission would have to confirm the basic theory of the crime that was then in the public domain. As early as November 29, 1963, the Dallas police by detailed public statements, and the FBI by even more detailed confidential reports, had committed the Government to the thesis that Oswald was the lone, solitary, motiveless assassin. For the Commission to have produced some other account of the crime would have required explaining the extraordinary statements and actions by *governmental bodies* which had prematurely attempted to establish the Oswald story. Moreover, this restriction had another dimension, which was rooted in our national psychology: in addition to the awareness sensed, if not specifically acknowledged, that the Commission could not bring in any Report other than one affirming the Oswald guilt, almost all respectable people were convinced that the Oswald story *had to be true* if the American government were the kind of institution that political propriety required us to proclaim it. The actual constraint which forbade the Warren Commission to admit the existence of a conspiracy was thus compounded by an emotional constraint against believing that there could have been the staggering conspiracy that any real alternative to the Oswald story inescapably presupposed. Another way of saying this is that if the Oswald kind of story had not been available from an early moment, it would have been necessary for the Commission to invent it.

Now, these observations do not in themselves effect the truth or falsity of the Warren Report; in theory the Commission could have announced a conclusion which, while pre-ordained, was also correct. But since the Commission's conclusion was pre-ordained, its publication adds nothing to the credibility of the Oswald story. Students of the assassination are thus still

TRIUMPH

Banquo's Ghost

LAWRENCE R. BROWN

SIX SECONDS IN DALLAS

by Josiah Thompson
Bernard Geis Assoc., \$8.95

ACCESSORIES AFTER THE FACT: THE WARREN COMMISSION, THE AUTHORITIES AND THE REPORT

by Sylvia Meagher
Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. \$8.50

At the first meeting of the staff of the Warren Commission on January 20, 1964, the Chief Justice outlined his view of the task President Johnson had assigned the Commission. Warren began by explaining that he had initially declined the President's request that he head an inquiry into the murder of President Kennedy on the ground that the role would be improper for a Supreme Court Justice. One of the assistant counsel present, Melvin A. Eisenberg, recorded in a staff memorandum what then ensued:

[Warren's] associate justices concurred in this decision. At this point, however, President Johnson called him. The President stated that rumors of the most exaggerated kind were circulating in this country and overseas. Some rumors went as far as attributing the assassination to a faction within the Government wishing to see the Presidency assumed by

President Johnson. Others, if not quenched, could conceivably lead the country into a war which could cost 40 million lives. No one could refuse to do something which might help prevent such a possibility. The President convinced him that this was an occasion on which actual conditions had to override general principles.*

The Commission's function is thus made perfectly clear. It was to prepare a report that would convince the world that neither an internal faction of the American government, nor any instrumentality directly or indirectly under the control of the Soviet government—war with no other government could produce 40 million casualties—had had a hand in the assassination. The actual *facts* of the assassination were necessarily secondary to the Commission's political function: if the facts led to either of these ominous possibilities, their disclosure would obviously contravene the purpose for which the Commission was established. It was bad enough that there were rumors of foreign or domestic political purpose behind the assassination. How much worse if an official Commission's

* The memorandum, dated February 17, 1964, is on file in the National Archives. To my knowledge, it has never before been published.

faced with the question of whether that story is inherently probable.

A vague sense of the Commission's limitations appears to have affected all published reactions to the Warren Report. No one who has studied the Report alongside the Commission's full 26-volume record—which itself is very far from complete—seems to have been convinced by the Report. Not a single commentator has ventured a reasoned, factually sound defense of the Commission's position *that acknowledges, let alone disposes of, the specific factual flaws in the Commission's case repeatedly noted and publicly reported by a number of critics.* Defenses of the Commission's case fall into three types: 1) isolated discussions of minor irrelevancies in the work of the critics; 2) elaborate attempts to demonstrate that the Commission's theory of the crime was *physically possible*—which, of course, proves nothing about its *probability*; and 3) proclamations assuring the world that the public virtue of the individual Commissioners is warrant enough for accepting their verdict.

Understandably, the critics of the Report are unappeased; and now come two new books challenging the Commission's thesis. *Six Seconds in Dallas* requires two separate evaluations. To those familiar only with the Commission's Report, the book will be of great value. Professor Thompson's exact analysis of the evidence describing the event on the grassy knoll—whatever it was, a shot or a diversionary explosion—should convince even the most unwilling reader that facts which wreck an indispensable element of the Commission's thesis, though known to its staff, were never examined and never mentioned in the Report.

What is involved here is a question neither of opinion nor of an interpretation of facts. An explosion unquestionably occurred on the grassy knoll within the span of seconds during which the President was shot. The evidence establishing this is simply too overwhelming for dispute, and so far as I know has never been disputed, either by the Commission or by any of its apologists. The Commission simply denies it was a *shot*. Yet whatever happened on the grassy knoll—and Professor Thompson assembles powerful evidence for the thesis that it was a shot—could hardly have been an innocent coincidence, or the work of the unaided Oswald, at that instant

supposedly firing from the sixth-floor window of the Depository Building. This explosion, from everything that is known about it, is plainly incompatible with the Commission's thesis that Oswald acted entirely alone.

But for someone who has studied the earlier critics, or read the Commission's 26-volume record with care, Prof. Thompson's work is far less satisfactory. It certainly cannot be accepted, as he hopes, as the starting point of a "third generation" of assassination studies. In fact, it is not a study of the assassination at all. It is a monograph covering the events on the grassy knoll, which touches on some related matters such as the autopsy and the famous "found bullet," Exhibit 399.* Strictly within this area Prof. Thompson deals realistically with the evidence. Outside of it, unfortunately, he puts forward totally undemonstrated products of his own imagination—such as a third rifleman firing from the roof of one of the buildings on the east side of Houston Street, or a souvenir hunter who "could have" made off with the found bullet and then, conscience-stricken, abandoned it on a blood-stained stretcher in the main corridor of Parkland Hospital, where the bullet was eventually found. Such flights of pure fancy do not help solve the mystery. Indeed, they stretch the imagination at least as far as some of the other assassination critics whose speculations Prof. Thompson dismisses as far-fetched.

Thompson's Dead End

Thompson's basic trouble is that he lacks any rational principle for accepting or rejecting any particular piece of proffered evidence. He simply has not thought the crime through. He has not made up his mind whether the Commission's staff members were a group of blunderers, or (as Mrs. Meagher's title clearly suggests) accomplices in deliberate falsification. He is sure there was a conspiracy, but he has not seriously considered what kind of conspiracy could arrange to kill the President, and get away with it. For if there was a conspiracy of any kind, everyone except Oswald *did* get away with it (at least everyone

but Ruby, if he was involved). Thompson does not ponder why *he* should be able to find clear traces of these conspirators, while the Commission, with all its resources, purportedly could not.

Similarly Prof. Thompson ignores any evidence that might be troubling to even his incompletely analyzed thesis about the crime. He seems unaware of the fact that the road sign, which is such a critical element of location in Zapruder's film, and hence in his own analysis, was replaced by a new sign, for some unknown reason, immediately after the assassination; and that no one knows the difference in size, angle and position between the present sign and the one shown on Zapruder's film. This uncertainty, of course, invalidates all reconstructions of the President's position on the road that are based, as the Commission's and Prof. Thompson's are, on an assumed identity between the Zapruder picture of the sign, and the present position of the sign. He seems unaware also, that there is a great deal more to the confusion between a 7.65 Mauser and a 6.5 Mannlicher-Carcano than either he or the Commission is willing to notice. Both brush aside the problem with the same airy chit-chat about the name "Mauser," and carefully avoid any discussion of the caliber. Yet it is the confusion concerning the caliber, not concerning the name, which indicates the planting of evidence.

As a final shortcoming, and perhaps the gravest, Thompson totally ignores the *persons* involved. There is scarcely a word in his book about Patrolman Tippit, about the Paines, about Ruby, about Marina Nikolaevna, about the pre-assassination impersonators of Oswald. Incredibly, there is hardly a word about Oswald—merely the statement that it is "still open to question" whether it was Oswald who fired the C2766 Mannlicher-Carcano from the sixth-floor window. Prof. Thompson has no doubt that *this* rifle was fired from *this* window—although the evidence is both circumstantial and, I believe, demonstrably planted.

To avoid all discussion of Oswald might make sense in a monograph confined to some narrow, remote aspect of the assassination; but it is absurd in a book that proposes to discuss carefully the critical period during which the shooting occurred. There are two unavoidable alternatives here

* An elaboration of this and other aspects of the assassination appeared in an article by me in TRIUMPH, September 1966.

between which every critic must elect. Either Oswald fired the C2766 rifle from the sixth floor of the Depository Building, or he was deliberately framed by the real assassin. It is impossible that he could have been a chance victim of police injustice, for the mass of circumstantial evidence dating from the previous March connects Oswald inextricably to the assassination. The evidence admits of only two explanations: either Oswald was the rifleman, or someone sufficiently in control of Oswald's actions prepared this material and guided Oswald's action to be consistent with it. There is no third.

The Commission obviously thought this problem through a great deal more carefully than Prof. Thompson. The Commission was aware that there could be no such "little conspiracy" as Prof. Thompson postulates. As many thoughtful men have repeatedly pointed out, a little conspiracy was never possible: either it was the lone, unaided work of Oswald, or it was a plan of major proportions.

Accessories After The Fact is an altogether different work in both structure and purpose. Mrs. Meagher concerns herself exclusively with the Commission's record, and does not purport to diagnose the crime itself. Her object is to show how frequently and significantly the Commission ignored evidence contrary to its thesis of Oswald's solitary guilt—or, rather, how much the Commission *had* to ignore or falsify its own record in order to make its official findings. The work is therefore an elaboration and extension of the studies begun by Sauvage and Weisberg. It is much more extensive than Sauvage's work and somewhat better organized than Weisberg's, but not different in kind from either. And although she follows the record regarding Oswald with much greater care than Lane did, her book is more than merely a lawyer's brief for the defense.

The lack of agreement among the witnesses about the source of the shots; the impossibility of fitting the Commission's thesis of the crime to the facts shown on the Zapruder film; the extraordinary, never explained change in the identity of the supposed assassination rifle from a Mauser to a Mannlicher-Carcano; the inconsistencies and suppressions of the autopsy; the strange movements of Tippit; the underworld life of Ruby: all these

are set out simply and clearly for anyone who seeks a thorough picture of the type of evidence that the Commission was faced with and refused to consider.

But the Meagher book, like Weisberg's and Sauvage's, suffers from a profound, though certainly unconscious, handicap. On their own showing, these three writers are liberals, and proud of it. In a Foreword to *Accessories After The Fact* Mrs. Meagher frankly explains her initial reason for doubting the official story, thus starting the long and rewarding work that produced this excellent study: her instantaneous conviction that only a right-wing extremist could have shot Kennedy. Oswald's apparent Communist background, she reasoned, *must* preclude his being the real assassin.

It is this unshakable liberal conviction that makes Mrs. Meagher, like all liberal critics of the Warren Commission—and, for some extraordinary reason, all published critics to date have been liberals—ignore certain essential facts that must be taken into account before the assassination can be understood. These essential facts relate to the *pre-assassination organization of the presidential motorcade*. It was this organization of the motorcade that alone made it possible, first, that Kennedy could be shot without the assassins being detected, and second, that Oswald could be framed for the crime.

The liberal critic cannot deal with these facts because they necessarily lead him to conclusions that are incompatible with his political assumptions. He can try to explain the real assassin's escape and the framing of Oswald—but only up to the point where federal authorities become involved in the explanation. The reason is simple. The liberal's conception of conspiracy must be limited to one arranged by racists, anti-Castro Cubans, or the like. It might be argued that such characters could infiltrate an alleged nest of right-wing extremism like the Dallas police forces. But that they could influence the organization of a presidential motorcade? It is absurd. Somebody with more political moxie than these types would be needed.

Yet the fact of the matter is that the TV and press cameras were removed from the motorcade, as was every investigative police officer. It was thus unavoidable, should an at-

tack occur along the parade route, that there would be neither professional pictures of the event nor trained police officers to start an instant investigation. Someone arranged these handicaps, and it certainly was not anti-Castro Cubans. Who, then? The liberal critic cannot even ask such a question, let alone answer it.

A Political Norm?

But if the liberals' reluctance to go to the heart of the case is easy to understand, the same cannot be said of men publicly hostile to liberalism. Why should they be unwilling to explore these matters? More than a year ago in these pages I pointed out something of the nature of the pre-assassination organization of the motorcade, as well as some indications of the flimsy mechanical evidence, some of it demonstrably false, that was used to make a circumstantial case against Oswald. Other than that article the only published works on the assassination from an identifiably non-liberal position have been puerile attempts at mockery aimed at the liberal critics, and an even sillier—and factually erroneous—defense of Ruby and of the supposed skill and speed with which the Dallas police arrested Oswald. (Actually, as far as the surface record goes, Oswald came to be arrested not through any police skill but through the amazing tips private persons gave the police and the press. And regarding Ruby, no one need have any doubt about the sort of man he was; it is thus childish to suppose that he murdered Oswald for any other reason than that he was ordered to shut Oswald's mouth by his criminal employers for whom he had long worked. It seems equally obvious that Ruby could never be allowed to speak freely; his belated recognition of this fact must account for his offer—made to the Chief Justice, but never accepted—to talk if he were moved to the safety of Washington.)

It is not, I repeat, surprising that the liberals have ignored the leads in the TRIUMPH article. But why should those who do not share the liberal faith—and who question the judgment of the Commission's members in other areas—accept their judgment in this one field? Have they concluded—however reluctantly—that we must come to accept political murder as one of the norms of American politics?