

critique:

WHO KILLED KENNEDY: A SINGLE ISSUE NATION LOOKS AWAY

by Joseph W. Masi

"Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, The Authorities, And the Report" by Sylvia Meagher. Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., New York, \$8.50.

The high geophagists who conceived of and penned the Report of the President's Commission On The Assassination Of President Kennedy understood nothing so clearly as the proper method of concealing the truth in a nominal democracy.

No report at all would have been unthinkable in the United States where information, however tangential or irrelevant, is demanded by those who inevitably exercise their right to ignore the object of arduous clamoring. So the Warren Commission chose the accepted American mode of censorship: over-publication of what is known and immaterial, tapping of the National Archives' dead for other exhibits, such as the President's autopsy photos which only have value in solving the debate over the presence of a conspiracy on that still-painful day in Dallas, November, oh you know when.

Surely the censorship of over-publication needs another quality to insure its success. In the case of the Warren Report it was the omission of any index to the 10-million word series of hearings and exhibits (including the summary report itself). As Sylvia Meagher demonstrates in her masterwork, what the commissioners label speculation is often a re-statement of known fact:

Speculation: The rifle found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository was identified as a 7.65 Mauser by the man who found it, Deputy Constable Seymour Weitzman. (Warren Report 645-646)

As Miss Meagher points out, the following paragraph of the Report acknowledges that Weitzman did indeed state the rifle was a Mauser. Characteristically, the issue Miss Meagher and any even faintly logical reader would certainly see as crucial: (i.e. was there a substitution of rifles to incriminate Oswald?) was not considered by the Commission.

But do we care anymore about the assassination which changed our lives just as the official account of it altered obvious truth? Some months ago I wrote that 1963 would be the

last chance for critics of the Warren Report to make good. My thesis then was that America the beautiful is often America the bored, especially when so many enormous issues are facing it. We are, I repeat again, a single-issue nation. If proof is required to sustain this theory all one need do is look up the New York Times of November 23, 1963, the issue carrying the account of President Kennedy's murder. What happened to all of the important stories of the day before, the haggling in the Middle-East, the small-scale (at that time anyway) loss of American lives in Vietnam?

The people who believed the Report never read it. Those who doubted it didn't have to. But what about Sylvia Meagher who not only read the Report, studied the findings and wrote brilliantly bitchy letters to magazines which took the conventional line of the government but even toiled to supply the index. (The Commission didn't dare give it?)

I am tempted to beg off evaluating the importance of her book. A young critic should avoid praising books as monumental endeavors lest he leave himself sparse elbow room to hail future works he may consider more important. But I do not expect to see a more important book on a more important subject. "Accessories After The Fact" covers every aspect of the assassination. Admittedly, Josiah Thompson's work with the Zapruder film in his "Six Seconds In Dallas" is superior to any other examination of that most indispensable piece of evidence we have seen Sylvia Meagher displays the multi-dimensional view of the Report which allows her to write with irrefutable logic on all of its problems.

Cleverly refusing to allow problems of space to force a deletion of any relevant topic, Miss Meagher, more than Lane, Thompson, Weisberg or Sauvage explodes the facts as the Warreners concocted them, and the methods the panel employed to find what they sought. In one supreme tour de force (p. 65-66), Miss Meagher reprints five paragraphs of the Report relating to the case for Oswald being on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository at the time the shots were fired.

Not satisfied with a general, amorphous criticism of the passage as a whole, Miss Meagher charges that

paragraph 1 omits relevant facts, paragraph 2 has logical defects, paragraph 4 is contradicted by testimony in the Hearings and Exhibits, and paragraph 5, in which the Commission states that a clipboard supposedly taken by Oswald from a co-worker was found on the sixth-floor lying in the "plain open" some ten days after the assassination, is hard to digest since Deputy Sheriff Mooney, who searched the floor shortly after the assassination, testified:

"...the floor was covered with officers...we were searching...we was just looking everywhere." (Hearings and Exhibits, Vol. 3 p. 289)

"Ignoring both the glaring and the subtle contradictions," Sylvia Meagher concludes, "the Warren Commission again has loaded the dice against the accused." Although this passage appears early in the book, it has impressed me that the character of the Warren Commission's document—the absence of a single mitigating fact that might even hint that Oswald was a man who walked this earth, knew the same ecstasies and despair familiar to Hale Boggs, smiled at his child, enjoyed gazing at a sunset, or didn't have the lust to murder a president stamped on his genes—is cause enough to make us wonder how the earth's most "flawed" human being and a great country's most "flawless" explanation to its people of the slaying of their leader could have existed simultaneously.

Sylvia Meagher both as a human being and as a creative researcher is a favorite of mine. This book will outlive Lane or Weisberg. It isn't accidental that Thompson and Epstein sent their manuscripts to Sylvia Meagher for examination of factual accuracy. Miss Meagher has held some reservations about a number of blind alleys some zealots have pursued. Her gift is just that: the illogic of a sympathizer does not get her applause because of a shared view.

Contrast her attitude to that of Gerald R. Ford, the House Republican Minority Leader who served on the Warren Commission. When asked on "Meet The Press" in 1966 for his opinion on the debate over the Report he said: "I think it's about time the Democrats quit washing their dirty linen in public." It was Hannah Arendt, was it not, who wrote some years ago about the banality of evil?

Photo of the bullet allegedly fired from a 7.65 Mauser rifle found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building by Deputy Constable Seymour Weitzman. It is impossible for the above bullet to have retained its undamaged condition, if as the police say, it inflicted seven wounds, including Governor Connally's shattered rib and wrist bones.