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SIX SECONDS IN DALLAS. By Josiah
Thompson. Bernard Geis Associates. 323
pp. \$8.95.

ACCESSORIES AFTER THE FACT:
The Warren Commission, The Authori-
ties & The Report. By Sylvia Meagher.
The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 477 pp. \$8.50.

FRED J. COOK

Mr. Cook is the author of many special
articles for The Nation.

Each new probing book into the assassina-
tion of President John F. Kennedy
brings America a few steps closer to an
inevitable moment of confrontation with
the facts. The issue for the country is
much larger than the personal tragedy
of Dallas that prostrated so many Ameri-
cans and still haunts the minds of men.
For, to be charitable, the Warren Re-
port is today almost universally regarded
as something less than satisfying, but if
its lone-assassin thesis is truly invalid,
the alternative is shocking. In that event,
we are brought face to face with the
theory of a conspiracy—a conspiracy
that succeeded and whose perpetrators
are still at large.

These two new books by Josia
Thompson and Sylvia Meagher force
even the reluctant (Max Lerner is an
example) along the path that leads to the
second conclusion. Vastly different in
approach and method, they marshal an
array of new and little known facts that
make belief in the lone-assassin conclu-
sion of the Warren Report virtually im-
possible. Mrs. Meagher is noted for her
comprehensive knowledge of the huge
mass of Warren Commission testimony,
investigative reports and exhibits. Her
first book comprised an index of this
material, and in her second, *Accessories
After the Fact*, her central thesis, which
she demonstrates time and again in spe-
cific instances, is that the Warren Com-
mission throughout its investigation em-
ployed a double standard: any detail,
however specious, that supported the
one-assassin theory was given the com-
mission's official imprimatur as fact; any
testimony, however seemingly credible,
that conflicted with this conclusion was
ignored or rationalized out of existence.
Thompson, assistant professor of philoso-
phy at Haverford College, takes a dif-
ferent approach. He concentrates on the
deed itself, on the record of what actu-
ally happened in those six seconds in
Dallas. He studies minutely all the pho-
tographic evidence, obviously the most
factual evidence, and he endeavors by
dispassionate, scientific analysis to relate
all other evidence to this undeniable pic-
torial record. The result in both cases is
hard to reconcile with the conclusions of
the Warren Report.

*Advance
Review
by
Sylvia Meagher*

Most readers will probably learn
for the first time from Sylvia Meagher's
book that the precise assassination meth-
od used in Dallas was spelled out in
detail for authorities nearly two weeks in
advance of the event. Before the trip to
Dallas, President Kennedy had gone to
Miami. Police there were worried about
security, for an informer told them that,
while attending meetings of extremist
groups, he had heard repeated talk
about an assassination attempt. On Nov-
ember 9, 1963, Miami police got their
informer to inveigle a hard-core member
of one of these extremist groups into a
conversation that was tape recorded. Ac-
cording to the Miami police, he "said
that a plan to kill the President was in
the works. He said Kennedy would be
shot with a high-powered rifle from an
office building, and he said that the gun
would be disassembled, taken into the
building, assembled, and then used for
murder." The tape recording contained
this direct quote: "They will pick up
somebody within hours afterwards . . .
just to throw the public off."

This tape-recorded blueprint matched
in virtually every detail what actually
happened thirteen days later in Dallas.
"To dismiss this extraordinary advance
description and warning . . . as mere
coincidence requires nothing less than a
complete suspension of critical judg-
ment," Mrs. Meagher writes.

The man who was picked up "within
hours" after the assassination in Dallas
was, of course, Lee Harvey Oswald. An
Italian-made Mannlicher-Carcano rifle,
which Oswald had purchased from a
Chicago mail order house, was found on
the 6th floor of the Texas School Book
depository, where Oswald worked. Wit-
nesses reported seeing a rifle protruding
from a 6th-floor window; President Ken-
nedy had been wounded at least twice,
Gov| John B. Connally Jr., of Texas, at
least once. It all seemed pat. Three
shots, three shells, three wounds—and
Oswald the lone gunman. So Dallas
police decided almost instantly, and the
FBI and the Warren Commission went
along with their verdict.

Yet Thompson points out that there
was from the start very persuasive evi-
dence that only two shots, not three,
could have been fired from Oswald's
gun. Two of the ejected shells bore
markings that only could have "been
produced by the chamber of Oswald's
rifle," according to the FBI, but the
third lacked any such identification.
Furthermore, this third casing had a
badly dented lip which would have pre-
vented it from holding a cartridge. This
dual evidence—the damaged casing, the
lack of the kind of identifying marks left
by Oswald's Carcano after actual firing
—certainly indicates that Shell No. 3
was not loaded and fired on November
22. There is one further addendum. The
handling of this evidence by Dallas
police was most peculiar. The two cas-
ings that bore the appropriate firing
marks were turned over to the FBI in-
stantly—but not the third, black-sheep

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casing. It was not until November 28, after the FBI had specifically demanded it, that the Dallas police surrendered this most suspect of shells. The whole sequence strongly suggests that here, at the very beginning, was a flaw in what was to become the Warren Commission's case for the lone assassin. The commission simply had to account for three shots being fired—and here was evidence that only two shots could have come from Oswald's gun.

The contradictions multiply. The Warren Commission, in developing its lone-assassin case, ran headlong into the timing imperatives resulting from a movie film of the assassination taken by Abraham Zapruder. The Zapruder film seemed to establish this fact: if the shot that first wounded President Kennedy and the shot that struck Governor Connally were separate shots, there had to be at least two gunmen. The reason: the fastest trigger fingers the commission could find could not get off two shots in the time interval between the wounding of President Kennedy, as recorded on film, and the wounding of Governor Connally. So the commission concluded that Governor Connally, his wife and all other witnesses who testified that there were two separate hits were wrong, and to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable, it developed what became known as "the single-bullet theory." This postulated the following sequence of events: the first shot hit the President in the upper back, came out his throat after passing through only soft tissues, plunged downward into Governor Connally's back, traversed his body, shattered a rib, fractured his right wrist and gashed his thigh. It has always been difficult to reconcile this construction, in which the Warren Commission puts its faith, with what one sees on the Zapruder film. This shows President Kennedy definitely reacting to his first wound at frame 224 (the frames are individual pictures on the rolling movie strip), and it shows Governor Connally turning his head, twisting his body and acting perfectly naturally for almost a full second afterward. The commission rationalized away this visual evidence by arguing that the Governor may have had a delayed reaction to his wound.

Thompson does great damage to this comforting theory. As a researcher, he had one great advantage. He happened to be employed as an adviser by *Life*, and *Life* possessed the original of the Zapruder film, which few persons have seen. The film in the National Archives in Washington, the one used by the FBI and the Warren Commission, is a copy of a copy—and so not nearly so clear and sharp as the original Thompson was privileged to study. Thompson found this: the Governor's opens in what appears to be an exclamation in frame 236. "Then, suddenly, in 2238 his

cheeks puff and, in succeeding frames, his mouth opens wide—he gives the appearance of someone who has just had the wind knocked out of him." Thompson cites medical evidence to show that this reaction, the result of the compression of the chest wall and an involuntary opening of the epiglottis followed by a rush of expelled air, would take place within a quarter to half a second after impact. The logical conclusion that can be drawn is that the President and the Governor were hit by separate shots—and if they were, there had to be more than one assassin.

Now comes confusion. The autopsy performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital on the night of the assassination confused the situation it was supposed to clarify. The pathologists in charge were not specialists in forensic medicine; they had not dealt with hundreds of gunshot cases as have the medical examiners in our largest cities. Furthermore, they were not aware until after they had finished their autopsy that doctors at Parkland Hospital in Dallas had found a wound in the President's throat at the level of the Adam's apple, a wound that had been obliterated by the tracheotomy performed there. The result was that the autopsy failed to establish beyond question the single most important thing it should have established—the trajectory of the first shot that hit the President.

The trajectory, as any police reporter knows, is all important in determining where a given shot was fired from, whether a suspect could have fired this shot or whether it would have had to be fired from another location by someone else. Not too much could be deduced from the fatal head wound because it was so massive, but the first shot through the body should have settled vital issues. It did not. As an FBI report later disclosed, the pathologists probed the President's back wound for a depth of about 2 inches, found it closed off, and concluded that the bullet had probably fallen out of the back during treatment at Parkland. Learning that a whole and remarkably undeformed bullet had indeed been found on a stretcher in Parkland, they decided that was it. But the next day they learned of the wound in the President's throat; they had already observed tissue damage that had seemingly been caused by a bullet's passage; and so they revised their findings, concluding that the bullet that had caused the back wound had passed out through the throat. The wound, however, was never probed in its entirety, establishing a trajectory, nor were the tissues dissected, the final and necessary procedure for the skilled forensic pathologist.

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From all of this there has stemmed a mare's-nest of rumor, speculation and argument. Thompson adopts the thesis that the first bullet penetrated only a couple of inches and that this was indeed the nearly perfect bullet, known as commission's exhibit 399, that was found on a stretcher in Parkland. He explains the throat wound by theorizing that it was caused by a bone splinter from the final head shot, angling down and out the throat. The trouble with this thesis is that it conflicts with the photographic evidence on which Thompson bases his book. The Zapruder film does not show the President arching his back or slapping at a bee sting in his shoulder; it shows him raising his clenched hands, his elbows almost at shoulder level, as he appears to be trying to claw some strangling thing out of his throat. This reaction occurs some four seconds before the final head shot. Thompson tries to reconcile the conflict by arguing that we do not know precisely how a person would react to a 2-inch back wound, the kind of dubious rationalization to which the Warren Commission itself was so addicted.

Some of the confusion about this first shot stems from the small size of the throat wound. The appearance of this wound led Parkland doctors to believe that it was an entrance wound, not an exit wound; and, since there is usually a difference between the two—entrance wounds are smaller and neater, exit wounds larger and more jagged—some critics have argued that the President was shot from the front, not the back. In an effort to clear up some of the confusion, I talked to Dr. Milton Helper, the New York City medical examiner, who is nationally recognized as a foremost authority in his field. Dr. Helper has been highly critical of the Bethesda autopsy and is inclined to believe that the President and Governor Connally were wounded by separate shots. But he is also impatient at some of the uninformed speculation.

"It's nonsense to draw any conclusions from the FBI report of what went on during the autopsy," he says. "You sometimes don't know where you are yourself during an examination and what you look for an exit hole may turn out to be an entrance wound. You cannot always tell. The pathologist himself, faced with a case in which there are multiple wounds, may be at sea for a time until he has followed the thing through and worked it out."

Dr. Halpern emphasizes that a bullet passing through a body has to leave a track—but not a tunnel. "It's not the same thing as drilling a cylindrical core," he says. "When a bullet passes through soft tissues and muscles, the track often collapses. It is not like a bullet hitting into skull, into hard bone, where it leaves a definite core that you can follow. When tissues collapse, you cannot always probe the wound. Sometimes you have to work and try to realign the muscles to get a probe through. If you can't, you have to do it by dissection, tracing the passage of the bullet through the tissues. Always you should verify by dissection."

It becomes apparent that there was no special significance in the Bethesda pathologists' finding that the back wound was closed off, after a 2-inch penetration. Such closing of the bullet track is to be expected in soft tissues, and it does not rule out the possibility that the bullet did pass completely through the body and out the throat. The FBI's scientific analysis of the President's clothing leaves little doubt that this is what happened. Fibers in the back of the coat and shirt were bent in; those in the front of the shirt were thrust outward. Dr. Halpern believes, in addition, that other autopsy findings regarding the bruising and damage to tissues as the bullet passed fully support the conclusion that this was indeed the bullet track.

Since the best evidence establishes so much, where does this leave us in deciding the trajectory of this first shot? The Bethesda pathologists placed the back wound 14 centimeters (5½ inches) down from the point of the mastoid bone and the same distance in from the point of the right shoulder. When one lines up this back entrance wound with the throat exit wound, one comes up with a bullet traveling in "almost a straight line, even perhaps a little upward," Dr. Halpern says. He adds quickly, however, that this would not rule out a shot from Oswald's window, traveling at a downward angle of more than 17 degrees, if the President were leaning forward when he was hit.

The trouble is that he was not leaning forward. The Zapruder film shows him sitting upright, waving to the crowd, and Thompson demonstrates, by analyzing other films taken from different angles, that the President was perfectly erect at the instant the shot was fired. The indisputable film evidence would seem to vitiate the leaning-forward hypothesis, which is the only way the angle of this first shot can be reconciled with the course of a bullet fired from Oswald's gun.

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The finding is basic because the Warren Commission's whole lone-assassin case rests on the assumption that this first shot was fired on a downward trajectory, and this assumption became in turn the basis for the seemingly indisputable logic on which its single-shot theory was based. The logic was expressed in the question: If this bullet did not go on and hit Governor Connally, what happened to it? It was going downward, it was not found in the car; ergo, it *must* have hit the Governor. This was the reasoning that led C.B.S., in its reconstruction of the case last summer, to support the single-bullet theory. This shot, it argued, had to go somewhere.

True, but when one realizes that the President was sitting in the back seat of a limousine elevated several inches so that he could be better seen by the Dallas crowds, when one realizes that the trajectory of this first shot was on a level or even slightly rising plane, then it becomes apparent that this bullet, after wounding the President, did not have to touch anything else in the car. And it becomes apparent that the bullet was fired from a different location than Oswald's 6th-floor aerie.

In analyzing the final and fatal head shot, Thompson adopts a thesis that is being increasingly embraced by critics of the Warren Report. This is that the President was struck by two almost simultaneous head shots at Zapruder frames 312-313. The Warren Commission held that one shot struck the President in the rear of the head, fragmented and blew out the right side of his skull, causing a massive wound. The Zapruder film, however, raises doubts. It shows the President's head starting to move forward, apparently under the force of the shot from the rear, at frame 312. But then in the next and succeeding frames, this motion is reversed, and the President's head and the whole upper part of his body whips violently backward and to the left. Thompson has demonstrated more vividly than anyone else the startling conflict of forces visible here, and he concludes that the backward wrench could only have been caused by a second bullet striking almost simultaneously with the first—a bullet fired from the wooded knoll to the right and in front of the President.

Both Thompson and Mrs. Meagher add one other surprising discovery. They have found in the National Archives an autopsy face sheet not included in the Warren Report. Prepared by pathologists at the autopsy, this diagram shows the entrance hole in the back of the President's skull, and from this an arrow is drawn illustrating the course and thrust of the bullet. But this arrow goes, not to the right in accordance with the commission's theory that this shot blew out the right side of the skull, but to the left. And Thompson demonstrates by some close medical analysis that this charted course agrees perfectly with damage found inside the left part of the President's brain and skull. Such a reconstruction, of course, leaves unexplained the massive wound on the right side of the head.

Where does all this leave Oswald? If he was not the "lone assassin," he was certainly a figure in a plot. After all, his Carcano *was found* hidden on the 6th floor of the depository and bullet fragments identified as having come from it *were found* in the front of the Presidential limousine. But was Oswald gunman or "patsy"? We may never know with absolute certainty.

There were witnesses who testified that they saw *two* men behind the 6th-floor windows of the depository just before the shots were fired. The Warren Commission decided they were all mistaken. But Thomson reproduces frames from an 8-millimeter movie film taken by one Bob Hughes. Hughes was looking directly at the front of the depository building as the motorcade swung into Elm Street below it; and, though he stopped taking pictures about five seconds before the first shot, the last 88 frames on his roll show what appears to be a human figure peering from the window next to the sniper's nest. Thompson demonstrates that the boxes of books stacked behind the window could not have created the appearance of the head-and-shoulders outline of a man because the boxes did not come up that high.

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The indications of conspiracy multiply. The most startling single attention-calling incident is the Odio affair. Sylvia Odio, a 26-year-old Cuban émigré who was active in anti-Castro movements, was living in Dallas in late September, 1963, when three men came calling. They told her they were members of the anti-Castro underground and claimed to be friends of her father, a political prisoner in Cuba. Two of the men appeared to be Cubans or Mexicans; the other was introduced as "Leon Oswald."

The day after this visit, Mrs. Odio testified, she received a telephone call from one of the visitors, a man who had called himself "Leopoldo." He told her that "Leon Oswald" was a former Marine; that he was a crack marksman; that "Oswald" felt President Kennedy should have been assassinated after the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs; and that "Oswald" was "toco" and the kind of man who would do anything.

Two months later, when Mrs. Odio heard of the assassination of President Kennedy, she fainted. When Oswald's picture was flashed on television, both she and her sister identified him positively as the "Leon Oswald" who had visited them in September with "Leopoldo." Investigation showed that Mrs. Odio had discussed the September visit with her doctor a few days after the event. There was also a letter from her father showing that she had written to him, inquiring whether he knew the three visiting men. And one of the counsels for the Warren Commission conceded that she had supplied details she could not possibly have known had the incident not happened.

How then could this occurrence, with all its implications, be shoved under the rug? In late August, 1964, the Warren Commission asked the FBI to investigate the Odio affair more thoroughly. In a little more than two weeks, the FBI, which in months had produced nothing further on the matter, came up with a handy explanation. It reported, just as the commission was winding up its investigation, that it had located a man named Loran Eugene Hall who said that he and two companions were the men who visited Mrs. Odio. One of his associates, Hall said, was a William Seymour, who looked much like Oswald. Jumping to a rapid-fire conclusion, the commission labeled the whole episode as a case of mistaken identity. After the commission disbanded, the FBI located William Seymour. He denied that he had even been in Dallas in September, 1963; denied he had ever had any contact with Sylvia Odio. Subsequent FBI interviews with all the parties concerned resulted in the complete collapse of the "Hall-Seymour" version that had enabled the Warren Commission to avoid recognizing the telltale odor of plot.

If, then, there was a plot, just what did it involve? Mrs. Meagher's researches point strongly to an involvement by at least some elements of the Dallas police and to a shadowy Oswald connection with federal agencies. Dallas police insisted to the Warren Commission that right up to the moment of the assassination they had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswald. Yet in a memorandum drawn up by the detective division on the afternoon of the assassination, they had revealed knowledge of an nlo and obscure address of Oswald's. They listed him as living at 605 Elsbeth Street, an address that did not appear in any of the records of the Texas School Book Depository. In 1962 and early 1963, Oswald had lived at 602 Elsbeth Street, and instant police knowledge, not quite precise but close, of this old address would seem to indicate an awareness which the Dallas force had denied. Allen Dulles, former CIA chief and a member of the Warren Commission, evidently appreciated the significance of this detail and asked police to find out just how the Elsbeth Street address had crept into their records. This information, if it ever was supplied, cannot be found in the voluminous records in the National Archives, Mrs. Meagher reports.

The Dallas police involvement with Jack Ruby, the slayer of Oswald, is more suspicious. It has been well known from the start that Ruby was intimate with many members of the Dallas force, but Mrs. Meagher builds a startling case. She emphasizes that here was a man known for his brutal passions. He liked to beat up people, including girls who worked for him; he had been repeatedly arrested, twice on charges of carrying concealed weapons; and he, apparently, had been repeatedly protected and complainants against him discouraged by some of his friends on the Dallas force. Mrs. Meagher shows that four of the five officers grouped around Oswald when he was led out to execution had known Ruby for a period of ten to twelve years; that, of the seventy policemen present at the murder scene, forty were acquainted with Ruby.

... and, ar-
turncoat, but a
Many students of the
even C.B.S., though it upheld the Warren Commission, found the smell of a possible Oswald-CIA involvement too strong for its not over sensitive nostrils. Now Mrs. Meagher adds some further, intriguing details.

The Warren Commission took the view that Oswald, a secret Communist, had indeed abandoned his country to sample life in the Soviet paradise. How had he financed his trip to Russia? The commission suggested that he had saved about \$1,500 out of his Marine pay and disclosed that it had found one bank account, intimating, without saying so, that most of the money had come from this. But Mrs. Meagher shows that this one account, the only one the FBI could find, had just \$200 in it, plus \$3 in interest, when Oswald drew out the money just prior to his departure for Russia. So the question remains: how was he financed?

After Oswald had defected, after he had visited the American Embassy in Moscow, after he had denounced his country to American officials there and declared he meant to tell the Russians all he knew about the American radar system—after all this, Oswald was treated with a consideration and even a positive deference that seem incredible. State Department regulations provide that “lookout cards”—red warning flags—must be made out and kept on file in such cases. One Harvard professor whose patriotism has not been questioned, but whose views were considered wayward by the FBI and the State Department, was subjected to a close and constant check when he went abroad—but not Oswald, the self-proclaimed turncoat. Mrs. Meagher demonstrates that at three separate stages of Oswald’s foreign Odyssey, “lookout” cards should have been filed against his name. In two of those instances, State Department regulations make the filing of such warning data mandatory. Yet not a single smudge was placed opposite Oswald’s name, and the only explanation the Warren Commission ever got from the State Department was that some protective Oswald jinx made employees goof every time his name cropped up.

The State Department was not alone in this mysterious dereliction. The FBI, eagle-eyed where Communists or suspected Communists are concerned, made no request for a “lookout” card procedure on Oswald, something it routinely does in much less publicized cases. Neither did the CIA. Neither did the Navy, despite the fact that Oswald had publicly announced that he was going to give away its radar secrets.

This strange leniency where Oswald was concerned was compounded when he decided to return to America, bringing with him Marina, his Russian wife. Then the State Department went to what can be described only as inordinate lengths to help him. Not only did it finance his return trip to America with a loan but it broke down all barriers to Marina’s swift admittance. The Immigration and Naturalization Service investigated Oswald’s application to bring Marina home with him, decided he was not a “meretorious case,” and refused to waive objections to the admittance of Marina. Mrs. Meagher shows that the State Department then initiated a series of moves designed to circumvent this inconvenient ruling by INS. A high official of the State Department capped this campaign by writing INS on March 12, 1962, urging that its decision be reconsidered. INS held out for nearly two months, but finally, in early May, 1962, it capitulated, stipulating that it was reversing itself only because of “strong representations” by the State Department.

Added to all this are the previously admitted facts concerning the FBI’s contacts with Oswald in Dallas. Oswald was known to FBI agent James P. Hosty Jr., whose name, car license plate number and unlisted telephone number, Oswald had jotted down in his notebook—a fact that the FBI initially concealed from the Warren Commission, as Edward Jay Epstein disclosed in *Inquest*. There was, too, a report that was given considerable credence by Texas officials, who passed it along to the Warren Commission, that Oswald was serving as a paid informer for the FBI. The report apparently originated with reporter Lonnie Hudkins, whose source was the Dallas sheriff, a man who was in a position to know. The Warren Commission circled around this item most gingerly, never questioning Hudkins or his source, and it finally accepted the word of the FBI and CIA that neither agency had ever employed Oswald. This implicit faith in the sanctity of official disclaimer does not dispel doubt. As Mrs. Meagher writes: “The possibility of a clandestine link between Oswald and the FBI has not been eliminated. The Commission has disposed of neither the allegations which originated with Hudkins nor the Hosty entries in Oswald’s notebook. They are two pieces of a single puzzle.”

It is a puzzle which continues to remain unresolved