

B O O K R E V I E W S

REASONABLE DOUBT

An Investigation into The Assassination of John F. Kennedy

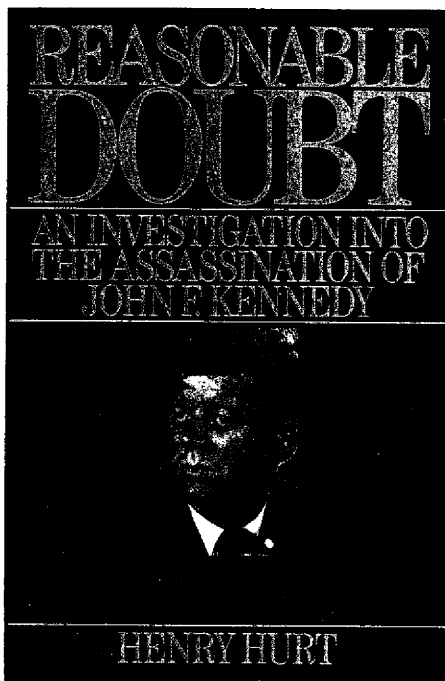
By Henry Hurt

(Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1986; 531 Pages, \$19.95)

Reasonable Doubt is not, as it presumes to be, the final word on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. There is a purpose behind this book which is not immediately apparent.

The author presents himself as an intelligent and responsible journalist who wishes to find the truth — or at least expose the lies — behind the murder of President Kennedy. Hurt immediately gains the reader's trust in his opening chapters, dealing with such matters as the lack of real evidence against Oswald and the unconscionable manner in which the autopsy of the president was conducted. It is obvious to anyone reading these chapters that behind the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy of great magnitude.

It is also apparent from these chapters that the Warren Commission did not even begin to investigate the real evidence. For example, Hurt writes, "if the Warren Commission version is accepted, Oswald managed to walk nearly a mile, encounter Tippit (the Dallas police officer whom, based on the flimsiest of evidence, the Warren Commission alleged had been killed by Oswald), murder him, reload his pistol, and be on his way in a little more than 10 minutes. By most any standards, this was extraordinary if not impossible. But the Warren Commission, ignoring compelling evidence to the



contrary, concluded that this is what happened. The familiar logic again seemed to prevail: since Oswald was presumed to have committed the murder, he must have been there in time to do it."

By now the reader is firmly on the author's side, assuming that the reader is one of the 80 per cent of Americans who do not believe the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed the president. But here let the reader beware. For when Hurt begins to explore the various theories and evidence regarding the conspiracy, he uses that trust to lead the reader into a maze of confusions and contradictions which only serve to obfuscate the truth even further — much like the Warren Commission report itself.

Not surprisingly, Hurt emerges from the morass to state that "we will never know the truth" behind the Kennedy assassination. This, indeed, is his theme. It is repeated throughout the book. This could be the author's sincere dismay, or, more likely, it may be a subtle attempt to induce a similar feeling of apathy and uncertainty in the reader.

In any case, the author then proceeds to assess — and reject — most earlier assassination theories. This is done in a peculiar, offhand, and sometimes contradictory manner. For example, after attempting to discredit the 1967 and 1968

investigation of the assassination by then New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison by labeling his work as "sensationalism," Hurt later admits that most of Garrison's thesis is backed up by solid evidence.

In another instance, while obviously relying on David Lifton's book, *Best Evidence*, for much of his material on the shady autopsy proceedings, Hurt quotes only those who denigrated Lifton's book or called it a "pack of lies." *Best Evidence* — highly recommended to anyone with a stomach strong enough for the truth — is hardly a pack of lies. Hurt concedes as much, but only after attempting to disparage Lifton's major premise that elements of our own government had to be involved in the conspiracy.

After proving his skepticism time and again in the pages of *Reasonable Doubt*, Hurt proceeds to give credence to the confession of one William Easterling, as unreliable an individual as might be imagined. Easterling, a self-claimed multiple murderer, habitual felon, alcoholic and former mental patient, "confessed" that he was on the periphery of the assassination plot. It is possible Easterling was marginally involved, but all indications are that he was not in Dallas at the time of the killing; it requires a substantial stretch of the imagination by the author to try to show how Easterling may have had something to do with the assassination.

Hurt nevertheless uses Easterling's questionable testimony to reinforce what is apparently his favorite theory: that it was Fidel Castro, perhaps with the aid of the underworld, who conceived and carried out the assassination. It is odd, at best, that Hurt, ostensibly the most skeptical of investigators, should be so gullible.

In fact, the many back roads taken by the author have the effect of generating confusion and distracting the reader from the important and never seriously investigated (by Hurt) possibility that elements

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