

CONTRACT ON AMERICA:

The Mafia Murders of John and Robert Kennedy
By David E. Schelm (Argyle Press, \$10)

OSWALD'S GAME

By Jean Davison; foreword by Norman Mailer
(Mead, Norton & Co., \$17.95)

THE CASE OF THE MURDERED PRESIDENT:

A Creative Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy
By Edmund Aubrey (Congdon & Weed, Inc., \$7.95 paper)

ONE BRIEF SHINING MOMENT:

Remembering Kennedy
By William Manchester (Little, Brown, \$25)

KENNEDY: A Time Remembered

By Jacques-Louis (Quarta/Visual Arts, \$40)

JOHNNY, WE HARDLY KNEW YE:

Memories of John Fitzgerald Kennedy
By Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David F. Powers
with Joe McCarthy (Little, Brown, \$7.95 paper)

FOUR DAYS:

The Historical Record of the Death of President Kennedy

Compiled by United Press International and American Heritage Magazine; New Introduction by Theodore H. White
(American Heritage, \$9.95)

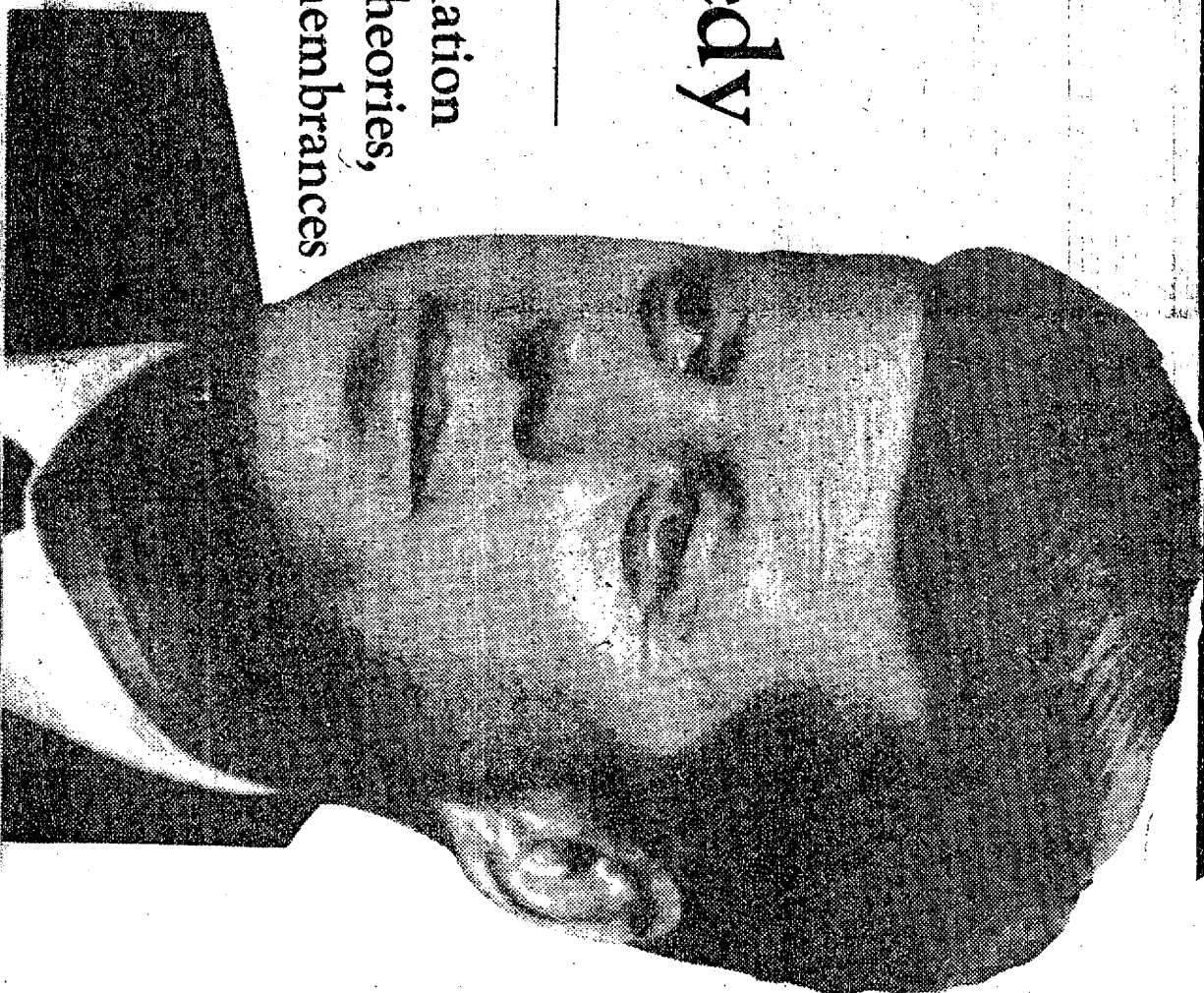
By Tom Johnson

Norman Mailer says in his foreword to *Oswald's Game* that Jean Davison "offers us a recognizable Oswald, a desperately fouled-up young psychopath, full of brilliance, arrogance, cruelty and bad spelling all in one."

Therein lies the core of the problem with most of the scores of books written on the JFK assassination: since psychopaths are almost by definition invulnerable liars, who is to distinguish their true state-

The Kennedy files

JFK's assassination still spawns theories, poignant remembrances



ments from their lies?

English common law recognized this problem centuries ago and concluded that only a jury could pass on the credibility of a witness, irrespective of the oratorical powers of the attorneys, the apparent sincerity of the accused or of any other consideration.

But there will never be a jury to ascertain the legal truth of Lee Harvey Oswald's many contradictory statements and actions, as he was slain by Jack Ruby only two days after Kennedy's death.

So writers such as Jean Davison arrogate unto themselves the task of deciding when Oswald was telling the truth and when he was not. And this is no small undertaking. Were it not so, the case could have been laid to rest one way or the other two decades ago.

But to many, the case seems as open-ended today as it ever was and perhaps more so, in light of more and more documents being released by the CIA and FBI under the Freedom of Information Act. Indeed, the burgeoning mass of JFK documentation can be manipulated to buttress virtually any point of view.

Some points of view demand more respect than others, though, by virtue of common sense if for no other reason.

Ms. Davison's book tells us virtually nothing about Oswald that is not contained in the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report. She arrives at the same conclusion as the Warren Report, that is, that Oswald was the lone assassin with no confederates.

Why, then, did she write *Oswald's Game*?

"It is one purpose of this book," she writes, "to show how some of the most widely read conspiracy books have presented what amounts to an imaginary history. The argument that Oswald was the tool of a high-level conspiracy does seem plausible, until one tries to fit it into the context these theorists always leave out — the personality and background of Lee Harvey Oswald, the individual."

In other words, she sets out to ascribe a motive for Oswald's alleged killing of the president. But the manner in which she does this is a far cry from the rigor and quality of scholarship shown in perhaps

the best two books yet written on the case, Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* and Josiah Thompson's *Six Seconds in Dallas*, both of which were published 18 years ago.

For example, Ms. Davison tells of an interview given by Cuban Premier Fidel Castro in September 1962, dealing with the apprehension in Havana of a CIA-backed assassination team. She says this interview "appeared in his (Oswald's) local newspaper some 10 weeks before the (JFK) assassination" and quotes Castro as follows:

"We are prepared to fight them and to answer in kind. United States leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

She writes on Page 22 that "... This book will present evidence that Castro's warning (quoted above) did, in fact, inspire Oswald to assassinate the president. Furthermore, the full context of Oswald's life directed him toward this reaction. In the final analysis, the assassination was a natural outgrowth of Oswald's character and background — and of the American-backed plots to kill Castro."

Maybe so. It's certainly possible, at any rate. But then, 198 pages later, after giving her interpretations of Oswald's motives for defecting to the Soviet Union, marrying Marina Prusokova, returning to the United States and all the rest, she has Oswald in his final interrogation session in Dallas police headquarters on Sunday, Nov. 24, 1963. He is asked by a Secret Service agent if Kennedy's death will change the Cuban situation. Oswald is quoted thus:

"I am filed on for the President's murder, right? Under the circumstances, I don't believe that it would be proper (to respond). Nevertheless, he went on to say that he thought there would probably be no change in America's attitude toward Cuba with Vice-president Johnson 'because they both belonged to the same political party and the one would follow pretty generally the policies of the other.'"

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Since Ms. Davison does not challenge this statement of Oswald's (she does challenge many others in the course of the book), it can be assumed that she "knew" he was truthfully speaking his mind in this case. But can any reasonable person be expected to believe that Oswald would risk his very life over Castro by killing the president of the United States if he felt that the new president would simply carry out the same policies? Either it was his motive or it wasn't.

David E. Schein's *Contract on America* ranges as far beyond the Warren Report as Jean Davison's book nestles close to it. Schein says he spent 10 years researching the book, mainly at the National Archives, and was helped by a team of Harvard students who worked for three summers verifying the 5,000 cited references.

Schein, who has a Ph.D. in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a computer systems analyst with the U.S. Public Health Service, used a computer-like approach to cross-reference thousands of pages of documents released from the FBI, CIA, Warren Commission and the Senate and House assassinations committees.

He says his systematic assault on this mass of documentation has resulted in two new aspects of the case coming to light: Jack Ruby's "overall involve-

ment with organized crime" and his positioning by the Mafia to seal Oswald's lips; and assassination threats against President Kennedy made by Mafia chiefains Carlos Marcello of New Orleans, Santos Trafficante of Tampa and Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa.

"A turning point in my investigation of the Kennedy assassination came in 1979," Scheim writes, "with the publication of the report, hearings and exhibits of the House Assassinations Committee . . . (which) concluded that two gunmen fired at President Kennedy, confirmed that evidence linking the Mob to his assassination had been suppressed, and found that the Mob had the 'motive, means and opportunity' to kill him . . ."

"Between the committee's findings and my work," he goes on, "there was enough new evidence to finally prove Mob culpability."

But again, as is the case with Ms. Davison's work, nothing is really "proved" by this sort of analysis. Theories can be backed up and suspicions verified, but that's about all.

Typical of Scheim's strokes with a broad brush is his assertion that his analysis of the eight months beginning with April 1963 "considers a dramatically intensifying series of telephone calls, then meetings in Dallas, between Ruby and numerous Mobsters from across the country — including many associates of Marcello, Trafficante and Hoffa. It unmasks a concerted fabrication alibi with which these Mobsters covered these contacts, conspiracy in its own right. And it clearly links this timely series of Mob contacts and Dallas meetings to the assassination of President Kennedy."

Mafia motives for wanting JFK dead fall into two main categories, Scheim writes. In the first place, he was seen to be in bed with Castro, in that he would not commit sufficient American force to get rid of the Cuban leader and thus allow the re-establishment of the lucrative gambling and narcotics activities that had flourished on the Caribbean island under Batista. Second, Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy was mounting the first real attempt to use the full resources of the federal government to fight organized crime.

Edmund Aubrey's *The Case of the Murdered President*, another what-happened book, uses the 26 volumes exclusively to punch holes in the Warren Report. But that's been done many times before, notably by this very book itself, first published as *Sherlock Holmes in Dallas* three years ago.

Also re-issued for the occasion of the 20th anniversary are *Four Days and Johnny*, *We Hardly Knew Ye*. Both remain as fine today as they were the first time around.

And so the only material really new in all these publications are some of the photographs in the handsome coffee-table books by Jacques Lowe and William Manchester.

Lowe, who served as JFK's official and personal photographer, has chosen over 350 pictures from 40,000 negatives. Through a text woven from speeches, anecdotes and dialogue, Lowe traces the Kennedy history from the arrival of the Fitzgerald and Kennedy families in Boston in the 19th century through the death of Robert Kennedy.

Manchester's book is similar to Lowe's but he wrote his own supporting text. He says in an author's note:

"This is not a scholarly work. It is instead a recollection of high summer written in the autumn of life, a tribute to a man I knew and an inquiry into why his memory should be cherished."

Manchester, a family friend and author of *Portrait of a President* (1962) and *The Death of a President* (1967), both about JFK, almost tries too hard in places to not let one forget just how close a friend he was.

Tom Johnson is a Dallas freelance writer.