

Reflections on "The Plot to Kill the President":

Acoustical evidence establishes that shots were fired at Kennedy from two directions. Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald. Ruby had nontrivial links to organized crime. The Mafia had the "motive and means" to kill Kennedy. Few of us would argue with those facts, or with the deduction that there was a conspiracy to assassinate the President, and that it is quite likely that organized crime was involved.

Where does this argument leave us? For Blakey and Billings (or at least for the person who wrote the jacket copy), "Organized crime assassinated J.F.K. The definitive story."

For most of us (i.e., the critics), that argument just does not go far enough. Blakey is a firm believer in Occam's Razor - "multiplicity ought not to be posited without necessity." The catch, of course, is "without necessity." It's different strokes for different folks, and Blakey's Occam's Razor cuts more closely than mine. (If that's such a great principle of logic, how come medieval philosophers were so - well, medieval? I think Lifton's work confirms that you can learn a lot by not prematurely deciding that a hypothesis is not "necessary.")

Organized crime involvement does not logically mean that the Mafia was the driving force behind the plot. Isn't it possible that it was brought in only after November 22? I expect that many of us think that we could come up with a plausible scenario incorporating all of B&B's facts, but with a different - and much less "definitive" conclusion.

Obviously the critical community is not B&B's intended audience. With that fact in mind, I would like to keep my comments on the book they have written distinct from a discussion of the book I think they should have written. I'll hold most of my detailed comments until later, but don't get the idea that I didn't find much to disagree with (and even more to add to). If you want a simple diatribe against Blakey and his investigation, you can start with Richard (Critic) Sprague's piece in the March TCI.

The Justice Department also doesn't seem to be the book's intended audience. Blakey's introduction to the Bantam edition of the HSCA report culminated with a powerful rhetorical call for Justice Department action. "[T]here is a department of government, called in Washington simply 'Justice.' ... The government, to live up to the meaning of justice, can do no less than pursue the course the committee has charted." I recall nothing at all like that in "Plot." Maybe the authors just did not want to look out-of-date if the JD had made a decision just before the book came out, but to me it looks more like B&B have given up on the JD. In a recent letter to the NY Times, Blakey asked, "When will the Department of Justice begin to live up to its name?" The subject, however, is not the JFK case, but the leaking of one of John W. Hinckley's letters. (See #232 below.)

It is the anti-conspiracy buffs in the Justice Department, in Congress, and in the media who should be reading this book. So, if you know someone like that who thinks all the critics are far-out radicals, make sure they know about the B&B book.

Blakey has indicated that this book was written for history. Back in 1979, he said that the hypothesis that the mob did it was "a historical truth." Now that I've read the book, and compared it with what I recall of the HSCA report, I think I have a better idea of what his perspective is. "Historical truth" is not the same as "the definitive story." Blakey is too sensible to say that the HSCA's work proved that no forces other than organized crime were involved at all. But he may be saying that in 50 years or so, when the trails really have gone cold and all the loose ends have faded from memory, it is the organized crime connection that will remain when the historians have to summarize the events of 1963 for the textbooks. That may well be the case, but obviously this kind of "historical truth" is not the same as simply "truth."

Another possible interpretation is that Blakey views the Mafia as an ongoing evil force of historical significance. If, hypothetically, a corrupt Army Intelligence officer were involved in the conspiracy, that would be seen as an aberration - a deviation from the basic historical function of Army Intelligence. B&B might not conclude, from such involvement by an individual, that "Army Intelligence did it." That person will not be around in 50 years, but the Mafia probably will; the historically significant truth is that the Mafia was behind the conspiracy, not that individuals outside the Mafia were corrupted and used. (I should add that I am certainly not endorsing this kind of analysis; I'm just trying to understand Blakey's perspective.)

More than most of us, Blakey links "historical truth" to the official version of the truth. His account of the events leading to the formation of the HSCA focuses strongly on the Church Committee investigations. My account would start with post-Watergate public cynicism; the role of the press (notably Hersh and Schorr) in leading the government, through the Rockefeller Commission, to investigate the Castro assassination plots and the JFK connection; and the role of the critics (the AIB, Groden, and - alas - Lane) in pushing Congress to act. Obviously Blakey's perspective is different from mine. We have to give him credit for what the HSC did - it reversed the official government verdict on the conspiracy issue. That was not a minor accomplishment. I don't think Richard (Counsel) Sprague could have done it; Blakey may have been just the right man in the right place. That doesn't justify not asking Humes the right questions, or locking records up for 50 years, or any number of other specific HSC actions, but it may be a "historical truth."

If Blakey expects his account to become the historical truth, it looks as if he will have to wait quite a while. The HSC is hardly the whole government, much less the only arbiter of historical truth. It is not just the Justice Department which has failed to accept Blakey's conclusions. After the shooting of President Reagan, there were (as I recall) plenty of references in the press to Oswald as a lone nut. I certainly don't recall any major media people telling us that while there may be a lot of lone nuts around, we should remember that there were conspiracies in the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations.

If you think of "historical truth" as being what people in general believe, the impact of Blakey's analysis looks even smaller. I expect that there are as many people who believe Eddowes' preposterous analysis as who believe that organized crime, but nobody else, was behind the plot. You can certainly find far more people who accept David Lifton's hypothesis. I would expect that the prospect of competing with Lifton for public acceptance does not appeal to Blakey and Billings.

One "historical truth" is that establishment opinion makers have, at the moment, generally lumped Blakey and the HSCA in with the critics. Blakey is in the same historical boat as we are, whether he likes it or not. (I don't think he likes it. The book certainly manages to avoid saying nice things about the critics.)

This kind of historical perspective may give us a useful way of looking at the differences between "Plot" and the official HSCA report. What is striking at first is that there are not very many differences. The biggest one is the way the book orders the evidence: first the acoustics, then Ruby, and finally an attempt to understand Oswald's role. Details aside, that is an approach worth taking (but not to the exclusion of others), and it is an improvement over the HSCA report. The Committee did not have the time to reinterpret all the other evidence after the acoustics became solid.

If Blakey has factual evidence on which a criminal prosecution could be based, he is not laying it out in public - obviously, and understandably. One is left wondering if there is evidence, buried in the HSCA's files or even in the published volumes, which B&B have chosen not to focus our attention on while the case is not officially defunct.

I still don't know why Jim Braden and Emile Bruneau were unnamed in the

Report - they are named in the book. Did the HSCA think they were too important to name, or not important at all? It's hard to tell even what B&B think - is Braden in the last chapter because they think he is a central figure, or because there was no other place to put him?

The book focuses on the notion that JFK's affair with Judith Campbell Exner may have been of crucial importance. There is no reference to Exner by name in the published HSCA material. (No thanks to the HSCA for this information, of course; I checked the Meagher-Owens index. The Committee gave us no index and footnotes to generally unavailable material; B&B have given us an index but no footnotes at all!)

In the excerpts published in Parade last November, B&B said that Roselli's story about a Castro-Mafia "turnaround" plot had a ring of truth in part because Roselli knew about the shot from the knoll. I was amazed to see that in the book: "Roselli could not, in short, have been aware of the fact of a shot from the knoll unless he had inside information, for up until the time of his death, in July 1976, the official view was that all of the shots had come from behind." It's more likely that Roselli or an associate heard and believed Mark Lane's "proof" of a shot from the front than that Roselli would have deferred to the Warren Report unless he had inside information. In fairness, there is a disclaimer in the book, noting that Roselli could have picked up the "speculation" of the critics, but I think it is ludicrous to cite Jack Anderson's belief that Roselli had not read the critical literature. (Robert Ranftel and I both recall, vaguely, that Kerry Thornley (no longer a reliable witness) has claimed that he and Roselli discussed the assassination controversy when he was a doorman in Roselli's apartment building.)

It may seem a bit bizarre at first to look at the assassination and RFK's reaction as elements of a Greek tragedy, with RFK's knowledge of the JFK-Exner connection being central. Once you get past the somewhat academic tone, however, it's a provocative idea. If you believe that Tony Summers' analysis of the scope of the conspiracy is closer to the truth than B&B's, you can make a case for a more political and less sexual version of the same theme: that is, what did JFK in was not getting in bed with the Mafia more or less literally, but getting involved with the overthrow of Castro. The crucial involvement could have been that which is firmly established by the public record (e.g., the Bay of Pigs invasion, and Operation Mongoose - not an assassination plot, but not a garden party either), or there could have been more direct involvement by the Kennedy brothers (as Jack Anderson's column suggested in 1967, and as Tom Powers has argued). According to Blakey, "Robert Kennedy knew that neither he nor his brother had played a role in the assassination plots against Castro." In a remarkably frank footnote - which may or may not reflect Richard Helms' knowledge and beliefs - Powers wrote that "The evidence strongly suggests that Kennedy, in his ignorance, tried to do to Cuba what his own murder did to us, and I can't help thinking there was a kind of rough justice in the event. This is a harsh thing to say, but I think Kennedy himself might have agreed."

I'll just comment briefly on a few additional points - more analysis later.

There are no chapters in the B&B book on the intelligence agencies per se. Even the HSCA report's conclusion on Army Intelligence - that, due to the destruction of certain Army files on Oswald, "the question of Oswald's possible affiliation with military intelligence could not be fully resolved" - has been left out.

B&B tiptoe around various Mexico-related issues where intelligence matters are involved. Most irritating to me personally, 544 Camp Street appears simply as a possible organized crime link, raising no questions worth mentioning about the FBI's pre-assassination investigation of Oswald. The Ferrie connection and the Clinton witnesses are presented without the stylistic bloopers of the Report, but the substance of the argument is not much improved. (We don't know why the Clinton witnesses did not testify in public, and the question of contamination by the Garrison investigation is not dealt with in detail.) And what about the Blahut affair?

On the basis of Blakey's public and private comments, I expected his analysis of the possibility of KGB or DGI involvement to be quite different from that of the Report. The analysis struck me as generally better, but not all that different. The conclusion that Nosenko was a fake defector with a truthful message seems reasonable. Unlike the HSCA, Blakey is inclined to believe that Oswald did utter a threat against JFK while in the Cuban Embassy in Mexico, but Blakey hasn't really moved very far from the Report's argument that Castro wasn't behind the assassination. Of course, B&B don't have anything new to say about the mysterious "confidential but reliable" source which/who reported this threat; I still feel that there is something of importance to be learned by unraveling all the sensitive Mexico issues.

Blakey & Billings are cautious in their analysis of Russian or Cuban involvement, but conspicuously less so in organized-crime areas. The HSCA report presented arguments which made it "unlikely" that Marcello or Trafficante or Hoffa had plotted to kill JFK; I don't recall seeing any such arguments in the book. The references to Jim Braden as an "organized crime figure" with possible mob connections (the relevance of which to the assassination remained uncertain) struck me as surprisingly unrestrained, especially in light of Braden's known litigiousness. Similarly, I was struck by the references to the possible transfer of money to Melvin Belli when he went to Mexico and met with a lawyer of dubious repute.

In the discussion of JFK's sexual activities, B&B quote from the ELSUR (electronic surveillance) transcripts which were physically removed from most copies of one of the HSCA's press handouts. (See #230 below.) To my surprise, it looks like the Committee members, not Blakey, were offended by the apparent breach of good taste. There must be an interesting story behind this!

As promised in the preface, the book is not a memoir, nor the inside story of the investigation. I wish they had given us more of the inside story. In this regard, as in others, the book still resembles an official report. I think that juicy details about the nature and limitations of a Congressional investigation can be a significant contribution to the historical record. Except in the organized-crime area, the book generally lacks the kind of factual detail and procedural insight that makes the Lifton book so provocative and compelling.

B&B's presentation of the impact of the acoustics on the Committee is interesting, as far as it goes, but I would like to see more. Sawyer is said to have had "trouble grasping" the acoustical evidence, but that's about all; perhaps insiders are expected to read stronger criticism of Sawyer between the lines.

I would like to know what was going on inside the Committee not just on the question of the suppressed ELSURS, but on the whole Exner angle. Is it true, as Newsweek reported at the time, that Exner was willing to testify, but only in public?

Thanks to Fonzi, the HSCA "inside story" which has gotten the most attention is the handling of Veciana's allegations about Morris Bishop. In the book, the Veciana story is dealt with - and dismissed - in one sentence. The book gives considerably more attention to Paulino Sierra, presented as a possible Cuban-Mafia-Oswald link. Peter Scott has looked extensively into this angle, and I hope that his analysis of Sierra and his group (the Chicago Junta [JGCE]) will soon be available in some form. For now, I can just say that the more you look at what Sierra was up to, the less it looks like simply an organized crime operation - which doesn't make it less interesting!

Reconsidering Oswald's role in context is a good thing in principle, but B&B's chapter is more of an analysis of Oswald's character than his role. Factual questions about the nature of the plot are not gone into in sufficient detail. There is totally unsupported speculation that Dutz Murret could have known about Oswald's attempt against Walker. It is not clear why, but B&B believe that Oswald did make a threat against JFK while in Mexico; they also

conclude (again without much discussion) that Oswald did not become part of the conspiracy until after he returned from Mexico. Although much has been made of the mysterious Latin handing out literature with Oswald in New Orleans, the book does not mention the third man, Charles Steele, who was hired by Oswald and doesn't seem sinister.

Blakey and Billings suggest that the conspirators "assumed, it seemed clear, that he [Oswald] would be killed, since there were not many avenues of flight from the Book Depository." There is no reference to the implications of this assumption. Would the plotters have assumed that an employee trying to leave the building would have been killed by the police? Doesn't the possible role of police officers in getting Ruby into the basement on November 24 make you wonder about the possibility of involvement by some law-enforcement officer, in some way, on November 22? If, as B&B suggest, Ruby was called on only after Oswald escaped alive on November 22, exactly what is the significance of the much-discussed pre-assassination Ruby phone calls? I think that such questions - and many others - have to be kicked around much more before we have anything like the definitive story of the assassination.

So far, I've seen and heard very little reaction to the B&B book. If any of you have seen, or written, reviews, please let me know.

And if you want to cancel your newsletter subscription, please tell me whether it is because this review is too critical of Blakey, or not critical enough!

Congressional Record material:

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220. [8 pp.] Material inserted into the Record by Rep. Stokes on April 30, 1981. The components are being listed separately (as #221-228); you can ask for copies of the individual components, but it is more convenient for me to copy the whole thing (i.e., #220). Comments on this material appear in subsequent sections.

- 221. [1 p.] Introductory remarks by Rep. Stokes
- 222. [2 pp.] Blakey on Fonzi (same as #150)
- 223. [3 pp.] Gary Cornwell's rebuttal to Fonzi
- 224. [2 pp.] Preface to B&B book prepared by Stokes
- 225. [1 p.] Preface to B&B book prepared by Preyer
- 226. [2 pp.] Blakey's rebuttal to the FBI on the acoustics
- 227. [2 pp.] Barger, Weiss & Aschkenasy rebuttal to FBI
- 228. [2 pp.] Detailed rebuttal to FBI by Barger and other BB&N people

The Blakey-Billings book:

Stokes noted (#221) that the forewords he and Preyer wrote were cut for reasons of space, since the B&B manuscript was 50,000 words over the length which had been contracted for. Stokes' foreword recounts in some detail the search for a replacement for Sprague. He notes that he does not "necessarily" share all of B&B's conclusions. Preyer also notes that "not all people ... myself included" will agree with all of the conclusions. Preyer says he was particularly impressed by the executive session testimony (still unavailable, of course) of the Clinton witnesses; he doesn't say anything about having been impressed, even briefly, by the babushka lady's story and Bob Cutler's umbrella-man hypothesis.

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229. 3 April 81 [2 pp.] Transcript (by PLH) of B&B's second appearance on "Good Morning America." Blakey tried to explain to Jack Anderson why he believes some of Roselli's story, but not the part about Castro having turned the mob assassins around to get Kennedy.

Does anyone have a complete transcript of B&B's first appearance? It is discussed, and quoted in part, by Gary Mack in the March TCI. (See the section on the acoustics, below.)

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230. 1 Oct 78 [2 pp.] (Bill Choyke, Ft. Worth Star-Telegram) This good wrapup of the HSC's public hearings included quotes from the two surveillance transcripts (Exh. F-623 and F-624) which were deleted from the press handout

on the day Ralph Salerno testified. Blakey quotes a part of one transcript on p. 382: "Since when is fucking a federal offense, and if it is ... I want the President of the United States indicted, because I know he was whacking all those broads Sinatra brought him out...." Blakey (who understands libel laws and Congressional immunity) attributes these remarks to an "unidentified mob figure"; Choyke says it was New York mobster Eddie McGrath. There is a slightly confusing typographical error in Blakey's version - a period between "broads" and "Sinatra"; Choyke says that McGrath knew specifically that JFK was seeing Exner. As noted above (p. 4), I'm curious about the inside story of these transcripts (and, in general, of the Committee's interest in Exner and the Giancana connection). When I mentioned the Choyke story to one HSC staffer long ago, he indicated that he (and perhaps others on the staff) were glad that most of the press had not picked up on this matter. (I still don't have the transcripts which some reporters got - does anyone?)

*** 231. [3 pp.] 17 Apr 81 (Haynes Johnson, WP) "The Light Brigade's Fateful Mission Remembered: Erneido Oliva and the Bay of Pigs"

This piece doesn't mention the B&B book, but the most interesting part is relevant to the book's speculation about what Robert Kennedy might have known. Johnson retells the story (from his 1964 book) about his visit to the site of the Brigade's camp in Guatemala with an unnamed "leader" of the Brigade. He adds that on November 22, he learned of the assassination while with the same Cuban, who "had just come back from a meeting with high U.S. officials on, as he always said, 'the problem of Cuba.' He was told by Robert Kennedy, in a phone conversation, that 'one of your guys did it.'"

I find it hard to accept Johnson's explanation of RFK's remark - that it was "a mistake that grew out of the confusing early reports the Attorney General was then receiving about Lee Harvey Oswald's Cuban connections." We don't know when this conversation took place, unfortunately. I don't recall any reports, even on November 22, that Oswald was allied with the right-wing Cubans. Perhaps the available records in the JFK library would reveal what reports RFK was getting, and who he was meeting with on November 22. (The recently released JD files might also indicate what kind of erroneous information was floating around.)

The identity of the Brigade leader involved could be significant, if one doesn't want to simply assume that RFK had been told that Oswald was an anti-Castroite. Tony Varona, for example, was allegedly involved in the CIA's plots against Castro, and allegedly had some links to organized crime. When RFK referred to "one of your guys," he may have had someone other than anti-Castro Cubans in mind. (My first guess would have to be that the Cuban leader was Enrique Ruiz-Williams, who was quite close to the Kennedys.)

If anyone has any ideas for pursuing this lead, please let me know.

* 232. 20 Apr 81 (NYT) Short letter from Blakey, describing the leak of Hinckley's letter, allegedly by the Justice Department, as "an outrage to civil liberties." (As noted above, p. 1)

Reviews: "Plot" is mentioned in composite reviews in the Washington Post (#219), and in The Washingtonian (#262 below). From the latter: "For the mind that reels at the immensity of Lifton's conjectures, the conspiracy envisaged by Blakey and Billings ... has a more manageable scope.... They build their case slowly and methodically... All in all, as I consider what I've learned from these books, I can't help thinking that if even a fraction of their theories turn out to be true, we're in more trouble than we think."

The acoustics:

The latest word is that the report of the NAS (Ramsey) panel will be released in mid-June, and "no later." This is said to come from a good source.

Information on the contents of the report is sparse. In the April TCI, Gary Mack reports and analyzes Blakey's comments on "Good Morning America." Blakey said that the FBI agents who did the "hatchet job" on the HSC had "testified" to the NAS panel, and had "privately apologized for blowing their

analysis" of the HSC's work.

Gary's interpretation is optimistic: Blakey wouldn't be talking like this unless he had reason to believe that the panel will confirm the acoustics. I'm less optimistic; I expect that the best we can hope for is that the NAS panel will say that they couldn't find any major errors in the HSC's work and that therefore further analysis (e.g., on the other shots) is called for before a firm conclusion can be reached. When translated into headlines, this will come out "HSC evidence 'inconclusive,' expert panel says." I would be very surprised if the NAS report gives any new momentum to the case - unless there is enough of an internal split in the NAS panel to heat the issue up a bit. I would be surprised if Alvarez does not remain negative about the work of Barger and Weiss.

Gary's TCI piece, by the way, identifies the mysterious Larry Darkel, whose pre-HSC analysis of the DPD tape is mentioned in the B&B book. Watch for more on the acoustics in the May TCI.

The "official" HSC rebuttals to the FBI (#226-8) didn't add much to what I already knew. Blakey's memo summarizes the situation and emphasizes the existence of evidence corroborating the Barger-Weiss reconstruction of the shooting. Blakey says that the FBI "fundamentally misunderstood" the HSC's work - charitably, because of a lack of expertise; "A less charitable comment would note the apparent institutional unwillingness in 1980 to admit that the FBI failed to investigate adequately the death of the President in 1964." (Yes, this is the same Blakey who used to criticize us for anthropomorphizing the agencies by talking about what "the FBI knew" or "the government thought.")

Barger et al. systematically rebutted the FBI report, concluding that "we do not find any insights, data, or arguments in the FBI report that we believe will support their conclusions that our tests of the DPD recording are invalid." These rebuttals do not attempt to explain the match the FBI found to an irrelevant shot; they emphasize the absence of even the most basic relevant data in the FBI report. My own analysis (Vol. 2, #11) suggested that the FBI relied on an erroneous, but ultimately trivial, statement about probabilities in the HSC's report.

Fonzi:

David Phillips has filed a massive suit against Gaeton Fonzi and The Washingtonian. He is asking \$70 million for libel and invasion of privacy (\$35 million, according to the Washington Post). According to the Washington Star's "Ear," "This is one to watch, Earwigs. Retired CIAers are ladling megabucks in a fund for Phillips' side. Insiders moan that it'll be long and mean, and could turn into a public airing of a lot of Kennedy Assassination inside poop that the CIA's tucked away. Oh, Lord. Here we go again."

My guess is that it'll be a long time before any of the CIA's inside poop surfaces; the HSC's dirty linen is more likely to emerge.

Fonzi told Zodiac News Service that "he is confident the record will show that Phillips committed perjury" in his HSC testimony. Informed sources have hinted to me that the testimony which is most damaging to Phillips is not his denial of the Bishop story, but testimony relating to Oswald in Mexico.

I wouldn't expect fireworks in this suit right away. Why did Phillips file, given the risk of embarrassment to him and disclosure of the CIA's "inside poop"? One possible explanation is that having a case in court, even if it is moving slowly, will help in his fund-raising efforts.

233. 12 May 81 (The Ear) and 13 May 81 (Maxine Cheshire, WP)

234. 13 May 81 Zodiac News Service, as quoted above

Phillips might be looking forward to the prospect of HSC staffers revealing, under oath, what they really think of each other and what they know, in detail, about the limits of the investigation. Perhaps by chance, the rebuttals by Blakey and Cornwell (#222-3) do not mention Phillips by name. Cornwell raises appropriate general questions about the validity and significance of the Veciana story, but doesn't get into the kind of details I raised earlier (Vol. 2, #10).

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Cornwell says a number of negative things about Fonzi's investigative work, and generally argues that the HSCA investigation was as comprehensive as it could have been, under the circumstances.

Rockefeller Commission records:

The Archives told me to write the Ford Library, and William Stewart (Acting Director of the Ford Library) says that "the Commission records are part of the historical materials donated to the government by President Ford on December 13, 1976. They are administered under his deed of gift and have not yet been archivally processed and made available to research. Donated materials such as President Ford's papers are not subject to access under the Freedom of Information Act. I am sorry I cannot be more encouraging."

(Stewart's letter, dated May 11, is #235.)

Can they do that?! Expert legal opinions would be welcomed.

Sounds like they don't have to bother repealing the FOIA - just get Reagan to donate all the government's files to the government!

Whatever happened to...

* 236. 31 Mar 81 (AP in SFC) "Reputed Mafia Boss (Marcello) Begins Bribe Trial" The Brillab trial of Marcello, Irving Davidson and others began the previous day in New Orleans. I haven't heard a thing since; has anyone?

Cuba again:

** 237. 29 Apr 81 [2 pp.] (Larry Liebert, SFC) A profile of Tupperware King Justin Dart, a longtime friend and patron of Ronald Reagan. "John Kennedy made a mistake when the Russian missiles were discovered in Cuba," Dart said. "Instead of leaving Castro alive to be the cancer in the hemisphere, we should have gone in there like gangbusters [!] and re-established a democracy.[!!!] We should have killed Castro [!!!] or run him out of Cuba. El Salvador is just a remnant of the Cuban miscue." ("Here, Fidel, we'd like you to have this special Tupperware sipping cup as our gift - go ahead, just take a drink....") But seriously, folks, RR/Rifle listens to this guy!

238. 14 May 81 (Jeff Stein, Rolling Stone) "Guerrillas in Gringoland" Bay of Pigs vet Jorge Gonzalez is training a quasi-covert group in the Everglades. He says he gets no CIA help, but wishes he did. Stein's sources say that U.S. military officials with ties to the American Security Council "have begun to organize their own private, clandestine operations in support of Central American rightists."

239. 14 Mar 81 (UP in SFC) "Latin Exiles Are Training in U.S.," says an article in Parade. More of the same.

* 240. 14 Mar 81 (AP in SFC) "U.S. Aides Want to Unleash Cuba Exiles" Some of Reagan's advisers want to; others don't. The dispute has been going on for some time; this sounds like a leak by the pinko wing. Nazario Sargen of Alpha 66 thinks U.S.-supported raids on Cuba would be a good idea.

One of these things is not like the others...:

Match the quotes and their sources:

241. 1 Apr 81 Robert J. Donovan in the L.A. Times

242. 6 Apr 81 [3 pp.] Editorial in "New Solidarity" (U.S. Labor Party)

243. Excerpts (wrenched out of context, admittedly) from the B&B book

244. May 1981 "News on the March: Preventative Justice" (National Lampoon)

(A) "British intelligence is the unifying thread that connects the assassins of Lincoln, McKinley, and Kennedy.... Due to the thorough coverup by the Warren Commission, it is harder to trace the British control over the assassins themselves.... In fact, the perpetrators of the conspiracy are known - the notorious Permindex Corporation - and they have been left running rampant...."

(B) "From the first crack of the revolver outside the Washington Hilton, there was hardly a flicker of doubt as to the kind of person it was who had pulled the trigger.... As the details of the life of John Warnock Hinckley Jr. trickled in Monday, they fell with the precision of a computer into the classic pattern.... Remarkably, he is 5 feet, 8 inches tall and weighs 160 pounds.

Those were the precise dimensions of John Wilkes Booth. [Oswald] also weighed 160 pounds and was of moderate height.... Truly, these assassins were slight men often with a big idea.... The fact that murderous attacks on Presidents have been made by mentally disturbed persons carries a certain reassurance even in this grim week. It is a reminder that the United States has no tradition of political assassination such as has existed at times in other parts of the world...."

(C) "Aaron Kohn confirmed the bad reputation of Beauregard [Junior High], adding that it frequently bred criminal careers.... Oswald did not have a police record as a youth, but his closest friend at Beauregard, Edward Voebel, told the Warren Commission that he did consider committing at least one crime, the burglary of a pistol from a store window. Voebel talked him out of it...."

(D) "Sirhan Sirhan: What do these names have in common? A lot more than you might think.... Researchers at the Joh College department of psychiatry now believe that a man's name, more than any other factor, compels him to take violent, anti-social actions. Dr. Fred Doktor explains the theory: 'Lee Harvey Oswald. Sara Jane Moore. Mark David Chapman. Proves my point. Normal people have two names; assassins have three. Their names are too long, and they get crabby. So they go out and shoot someone like Martin Luther King, before he can shoot them.'... 'Of course, criminal behavior is not caused by name alone,' points out Professor Peter Jay Phillips. 'There is also the face.'"

"Best Evidence"

Lifton's book has completed a 12-week run on the NYT best-seller list. It is now expected that a paperback edition will be published in November.

* 245. Stokes' response of March 27 to my letter (#217), asking for the release of relevant HSC records. Stokes notes that he has no jurisdiction over those files. Some are "housed within" the Justice Department, and others are at the Archives, embargoed for 50 years. All Stokes could do for me was recommend that I forward my letter to the Justice Department, which I have done.

I have learned from a fairly good source that Lifton's conclusions were not officially presented to the entire Forensic Pathology panel.

* 246. 3 Mar 81; Letter from Dr. Lattimer to New York magazine. As in his letter to Time (#122), Lattimer says that Dr. Jenkins saw the entry wound in the back - still hard to believe, given Jenkins' WC testimony and the failure of the other Dallas doctors to mention it. Lattimer says Humes told him he did personally cut the brain stem and the optic nerves before removing the brain.

* 247. 6 Mar 81; letter re Jenkins from Lattimer to Gary Owens. Mentions that Jenkins subsequently told Humes of his observation.

* 248. 16 Nov 66 [2 pp.] Liebeler to Rankin, transmitting his memo. There are 20 names on the "cc" list. This copy is from the recently processed Justice Department (Criminal Division) files.

* 249. 8 Nov 66 [13 pp.] The Liebeler memo, as discussed in Lifton's book.

* 250. Some of the attachments to #249 [3 pp.; 16 WH 984, 17 WH 45-46]

* 251. Date unknown; "Rep. Sawyer Tags New Book on JFK 'Totally Crackpot'" (By Jerry Morlock; paper unknown) "How would I know how many caskets were brought into that hospital that night?... I just know that Kennedy's body was in the same condition when it arrived at Bethesda as when it left Parkland." Sawyer says that "Lifton is just another one who wants to make money from this." Lifton says Sawyer was "stunningly incompetent" in his investigation.

252. Date unknown (Houston Chronicle) [3 pp.] Extensive quotes from interview with Lifton, plus a sidebar with Lattimer's explanation of the small throat wound and the head snap.

253. (Same paper, same date) Totally negative review by the president of a Houston electronics firm, Tom Woods.

254. 14 Jan 81 (Seth Kantor, Atlanta Constitution) A descriptive article. Kantor noted that Lifton had not yet checked out the Walter Reed evidence.

255. 16 Jan 81 [2 pp.] (Beaumont, TX Journal) Lifton describes the source of the White House photo showing Rep. Thomas winking at LBJ.

256. 25 Jan 81 [2 pp.] (Conway, Wash. Star) A "disturbing book."

257. 31 Jan 81 [3 pp.] (Jeffrey Hart, King Features) Lifton "has established some extraordinary facts.... Lifton is a monomaniac as regards this assassination.... But such people are worthwhile, and he has not returned empty-handed."

258. 1 Feb 81 [3 pp.] (Cox, Denver Post) Sympathetic report of interview with Lifton.

* 259. March 1981 [6 pp.] From "At 866," the staff newspaper of Macmillan. Description of the publicity campaign, history of the book, photos.

260. 8 Mar 81 (Oregonian) "Compelling reading," but "it just won't wash."

261. 8 Mar 81 (Oxnard, CA Press-Courier) "Kennedy autopsy fake, author says at party"; "'I don't think the Secret Service originated the plan,' he said, 'But it shows the agency is not incorruptible.'"

* 262. April 1981 [3 pp.] (Anne Chamberlin, Washingtonian) "Sleeping With the Lights On - How I Finally Began to Read the JFK Books and Now Jump Three Feet When I Hear a Door Click" She had an article in the same issue of the Saturday Evening Post as the excerpt from Tink Thompson's book in 1967: "I was writing, toujours gaie [about throwaway paper clothes], while a few pages away this young philosophy professor was demolishing the conclusions of the finest flower of the Establishment with only the blunt Stone Age tools that were available to him at the time." She calls "Best Evidence" a "blockbuster." "Insistent and inescapable, Lifton never raises his voice. He just grabs you by the throat and refuses to let you loose until you've heard what he has to say." (Additional quotes on p. 6 above.)

* 263. 3 Apr 81 [2 pp.] (Publishers Weekly) "Story Behind the Bestseller" Quite a nice article. "[Lifton said] 'it will always be a disappointment, no matter how successful the book is as a book, if there is not some kind of official follow-up.' ... A Justice Department spokesperson ... knew of no consideration of Lifton's evidence within the department."

** 264. 5 Apr 81 [2 pp.] (Oakland Tribune) Review by Peter Dale Scott. Comments on the transit/no-transit controversy, and Humes' refusal to recant his testimony on the location of the small head wound. "In the end, however, the best criterion of an important new hypothesis is not so much its fallibility in details as its capacity to generate new critical issues and significant findings. In my opinion, Lifton's research has already done this. Whatever its faults, quirks and limitations, Lifton's is the most important new book on the Kennedy assassination to appear in the past 14 years."

265. 16 Apr 81 (C. Kaiser, Rolling Stone) "The selling of a conspiracy" "In Best Evidence, there is no excavated grassy knoll [a theory attributed to Lifton by Esquire in 1967], but the book itself, now in its fourth printing with no end in sight, is good evidence that, with a large enough promotional budget, it is possible to make a best seller out of almost anything - even an empty coffin."

266. 21 Apr 81 [2 pp.] (Daily World, the CPUSA paper) "Incredible? Yes, it is. Possible? Why the hell not! ... The upshot is that when we consider the COINTELPRO operation, ... manufacturing of evidence against political activists ... and a number of other events of the past 30 years, it could very well be true that the hit on Kennedy was an inside job."

Credits: Thanks to R. Blakey (#220-8), M. Ewing (231, 262), J. Goldberg (230, 232-3), B. Kenton & D. Lifton (251-8, 262), P. Lambert (241, 260-1), M. Lee (234), D. Lifton (259, 265), J. Marshall (262), F. Newcomb (248-50), G. Owens (247), R. Ranftel (264, 266), and L. Sproesser (242).

More to come: I hope to put another issue out soon - as soon as I have something to say about the NAS report, probably. I have many more clippings and other goodies on hand, but I don't want to delay this issue any longer. If I owe you a letter, please hang in there for a while!