

Justice Department concludes its response to the HSCA:

On March 28, the Justice Department forwarded its long-awaited formal response to Peter Rodino, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Not surprisingly, the Department "has concluded that no persuasive evidence can be identified to support the theory of a conspiracy" in either the JFK or King assassinations. "No further investigation appears to be warranted in either matter unless new information which is sufficient to support additional investigative activity becomes available."

Basically, the substance of this response is unsurprising. The report notes that the acoustical evidence has been rebutted by the NAS Panel. The JD was not able to negotiate access to the Bronson and Daniel films. Review of the entire HSCA Report, all "relevant" FBI reports, and correspondence from the public has led to the conclusion that "all investigative leads which are known to the Department have been exhaustively pursued either during the Department's response to the [HSCA] report or in one of the previous investigations of the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King."

More striking than the details of the JD "report" are the circumstances of its submission and release. The report is in the form of a five-page letter prepared for the signature of Assistant AG William Weld, head of the Criminal Division. [#1988.74] On March 30, 1988, it was revealed that Weld had resigned, effective at the end of the previous day. (10 EOC 1.7) His resignation was generally believed to be in protest against AG Ed Meese's refusal to step down.

On Weld's next-to-last day, the five-page letter was sent - unsigned and undated - to Rodino, not by Weld or anyone in the Criminal Division, but by Acting Assistant AG Thomas Boyd of the Office of Legislative Affairs. His cover letter [#1988.75] reads in full as follows: "One of the interesting features of employment with a large governmental organization is that matters occasionally come bubbling to the surface from the depths of the bureaucracy. An example of this phenomenon is the enclosed report which relates back to the activities of the Select Committee on Assassinations. While this is long overdue and may no longer be of interest, I am forwarding it to you for your information and appropriate disposition."

With that kind of recommendation, perhaps we should not be surprised that the report did not bubble out of Rodino's office at the time. (The cover letter does not indicate any restriction on distribution.) If the JD or Rodino sent copies to former HSCA members, or to other Congressmen who had previously expressed interest - as they had told Reps. Dellums and Stenholm they would - those copies did not make it to the buff or media grapevine.

In fact, the report apparently did not come to the attention of the people in the JD who were handling a FOIA request from Dr. Lou Kartsonis, a San Diego buff. After two years of unproductive phone calls, he wrote a FOIA letter to the Criminal Division on March 22, 1988. A week later, he was advised that a draft report had been located but was withheld as a pre-decisional document. On June 27, Kartsonis' administrative appeal of April 13 was turned down. "This material is not appropriate for discretionary release," said Richard Huff of the Office of Information and Privacy.

Kartsonis then wrote to Rodino, Sen. Alan Cranston, Rep. Bill Lowery of San Diego, and others. Cranston and Lowery made inquiries on his behalf. On August 15, Huff wrote that "Since our response to you dated June 27, 1988, this Office has learned that a five-page report has been sent to the Committee via the Department's Office of Legislative Affairs," and sent a copy. [#76]

This confusion leaves open the possibility that the document originally denied to Kartsonis is not the one which had been sent to Rodino. Was there ever a more substantive draft report? This should be checked out.

According to Lud Arons, the report was noted on NBC News on August 25 by Carl Stern, whom Kartsonis had told of his efforts. An AP story by Christo-

pher Callahan appeared about ten days later. (WP, 5 Sep, #77; Wash. Times, 5 Sep, 2 pp., #78; Sac. Bee, 4 Sep, #79; SFX, 4 Sep, #80.) "The Justice Department's response to the conspiracy theories comes as no surprise. It is, however, the first time the department has made a formal conclusion on the assassinations, said Justice spokesman Dean St. Dennis.... Mr. Stokes could not be reached for comment, but a former select committee aide who has fought to have the panel's records opened to the public blasted the department's response. 'All these years later we find out they've been doing nothing,' said Kevin Walsh. 'Members themselves had faith that the Justice Department was going to pursue this, and now we see all these years later than their faith was misplaced.'" (#78)

Walsh particularly criticized the Department's failure to study the Bronson film, suggesting that the JD should have just subpoenaed it. (#79) I expect to see more about that film in Gary Mack's "Coverups!" - which I hear will be revived soon.

"Spotlight" emphasized that the "inexplicable" JD decision to close the case came despite Marita Lorenz' testimony about her trip with Oswald et al. to meet Ruby, and other information from Mark Lane. Some Warren Commission documents, are allegedly still improperly withheld. (#81, 26 Sep 88, 2 pp.)

All the headlines for the AP article, and the lead, properly emphasized that the JD inquiry had been officially ended. However, Weld's summation was a bit less definitive: "While this report is intended to 'close' the Department's formal response to the Select Committee final report, it is the Department's intention to continue to review all correspondence and to investigate, as appropriate, any potentially productive information."

This hedging is cold comfort. In context, all it gives us is an excuse to keep those cards and letters going to the JD, and to believe that they will not be ignored any more than they have been for the last ten years. Weld's successor, by the way, is Edward Dennis. (SFC, 5 Oct 88, #82)

I have read previous JD letters closely, looking (for example) for evidence that they were taking the Marcello allegations seriously. Their language has, on occasion, been peculiar. In this instance, the most peculiar thing is the absence of any specific reference to the organized crime hypothesis. This letter does not even mention the Committee's findings on possible involvement by individual anti-Castro Cubans or Mafia members, which the HSCA failed to repeat in their recommendations. No specific evidence, other than the acoustics and the two films mentioned above, is cited.

In response to the HSCA's most general charge - that the JD review the entire Report - Weld wrote that "As the Department advised the former members of the [HSCA] on October 7, 1980, Departmental attorney and investigative personnel reviewed the entire Select Committee report as well as all relevant [FBI] reports. The [FBI] was asked to further investigate any aspect of the assassinations which Departmental attorneys felt had even an arguable potential of leading to additional productive information. The [FBI] completed those tasks and, as reported previously, developed no information of value."

The question remains: did they think about the case against the Mafia seriously, or not? In that context, it is worth looking at what they said about the acoustics. I have felt since the NAS Report in 1982 that the JD would have no misgivings about declaring that aspect of the case closed (even though I would not have gone that far myself). I still have trouble believing that comments from the public, especially on the acoustics, had as much to do with the delay as this report indicates.

"There are no 'new developments' included in this report; rather, we are taking the formal action of advising the Judiciary Committee that following a lengthy period of review of unsolicited correspondence and other information available to the Department that we have accepted the conclusions of the National Academy of Sciences panel of experts... and have determined that it appears unlikely that new information will emerge which would provide a

productive basis for further investigative activity regarding either the [JFK or MLK] assassinations."

"The Department has continued to carefully review incoming unsolicited correspondence related to the assassinations, without regard to whether such correspondence was generated in response to the Department's acoustical review. While, as a result of the limited resources available for this activity, the Department has advised frequent writers that individual responses were not possible for most submissions, each letter had been reviewed by at least two attorneys and those letters raising either scientific or investigative issues have been referred to the appropriate Department components for further consideration."

Parenthetically, has any EOC reader been so advised? Could I have a copy of your correspondence? My not-very-frequent letters were typically not even acknowledged spontaneously.

"The flow of such unsolicited correspondence has been the primary cause of our reluctance to formally advise the Judiciary Committee of our 'completion' of the Department's response to the Select Committee's final report, since, despite the resolution of those specific tasks sought by the Select Committee, we have considered the review of all correspondence to be potentially productive."

What should we make of that sentence? I have trouble believing that it tells the real story. If it is basically correct, I would like to know whose correspondence they are referring to.

Weld's letter also specified that "Virtually all of the [JD] actions sought by the Committee were completed by the end of 1983. Those actions and the results were reported to... Louis Stokes, and other former Committee members in the form of correspondence and copies of scientific reports."

Much of the report consists of statements of compliance with the three recommendations on p. 7 of the HSCA report. Bronson and Daniel "insisted upon... privacy assurances [like those tentatively offered by the HSCA] in addition to other assurances as a condition of making the films available for government analysis. Consistent with our notice to Congressman Stokes in April 1981 that we would not further pursue the acquisition of those films from their owners absent a Congressional request and Congressional assistance, the Department has taken no further action in this regard. It should be noted that the value of these films in evaluating the acoustical evidence was significantly diminished in view of the conclusions of the [NAS]."

The letter summarizes the work of the FBI and NAS in rebutting the HSCA's acoustical evidence. "The Select Committee's goal of advancement of the application of the principles of acoustics to forensic questions was advanced by both acoustical analyses. Both of the studies were reported to the law enforcement community in a two-part article entitled 'Acoustic Gunshot Analysis: The Kennedy Assassination and Beyond' published in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin" for November and December 1983.

The non-signer of this letter concluded: "Please do not hesitate to contact me if you desire any additional information regarding the activities undertaken by the Department in response to the Select Committee report." If any EOC readers know of such inquiries by Rodino, any other Representatives, or the press, please let me know.

Query - military intelligence:

Does anyone have any information about surveillance or other activities of dubious propriety carried out in the U.S. by Naval or Marine Corps Intelligence from 1959 through 1963? I have not yet even checked published sources, so any information would be greatly appreciated. I recall a lot of attention around 1975 to domestic activities by Army Intelligence; did anything comparable come out about ONI or the USMC?

The Best of Evidence, the Worst of Evidence:

Look out for a new trade paperback edition of David Lifton's "Best Evidence." (Carroll & Graf, \$11.95) In a new six-page afterword, Lifton describes how James Fox, a former Secret Service photographer, showed him the autopsy photographs. Some Dallas medical personnel told Lifton that they disagreed with their recollections. Lifton claims there is a serious conflict between one X-ray (showing a hole extending at least to the right eye socket) and the photos, which show no such huge hole. "This startling mismatch... is evidence that they were not exposed at the same time and suggests some sort of reconstruction."

Six of the autopsy photos are reproduced in this edition. Lifton says he is publishing them "with great reluctance, but with the realization that it is an absolute necessity.... We prefer to remember [JFK] at the zenith of his life, for his thousand days were a special time for this country. But these autopsy photographs are also a part of those thousand days, also a part of the public record, and the American people have a right to see them."

Do we really? I regret that Lifton's reluctance was not strong enough to solidify his immediate reaction - upon seeing Fox's set - that the photos "should never be published." Two of the photos correspond to published Dox drawings, so publishing them to point out apparent imperfections in the drawings is defensible. One photo shows "what appears to be a clip or device inside the head," suggesting reconstruction. One can certainly dispute the evidentiary value of parts of the photos which could have been blacked out or replaced by drawings. The HSCA itself published enlargements of small sections of several photos, including the semicircular exit defect in the skull. (7 HSCA 86, 92, 105, 106, 119.)

The publishers have provided an erratum slip, noting that two of the photos appear backwards, due to a printer's error which will be corrected in future printings. One photo, correctly labeled as a "left lateral" view, does not show the head wound, but looks like a right lateral view.

More book news:

Jim Garrison's book will be published on November 22 by Sheridan Square Press, a division of the Institute for Media Analysis. (145 West 4th St., NYC 10012) The title is "On the Trail of the Assassins: My Investigation and Prosecution Of the Murder of President Kennedy."

If you are on Ted Gandolfo's mailing list, you already know of IMA's special pre-publication offer for his subscribers (\$17.60 postpaid; the cover price will be \$19.95.)

Garrison is said to tell how he learned that Oswald, Ferrie, and Banister "all were connected to Clay Shaw - and to the CIA and the FBI."

An afterword by Carl Oglesby will explain "why Jim Garrison's view - that the primary force behind the assassination was the CIA rather than the Mafia - is far more compelling than the contrary view, espoused by Robert Blakey and David Scheim." Norman Mailer says that the book "provides the most powerful detailed case yet made... that the plotters and key operators came not from the Mob, but the CIA." [These quotes are from a flyer for IMA: #83, 2 pp.; PW ad, 16 Sep: #84]

"Compelling" and "powerful," maybe, but "substantiated" and "true" are still the adjectives on which the book will have to be judged.

"Mafia Kingfish" should be appearing in stores by early November. Publishers Weekly calls it an "engrossing, startlingly detailed biography" based on FOIA material. John Davis "also presents a well-organized summary of the large body of circumstantial evidence pointing to Marcello as the mastermind of the assassination.... The material indicates that the authorities were virtually powerless to cope with the conspiracy because several politicians and law enforcement officials at local, state and federal

levels had been compromised in their dealings with Marcello and his associates." (7 Oct, #85)

David Belin's book is also scheduled for November publication, with the title "Final Disclosure: The Full Truth About the Assassination of President Kennedy." (Scribners, \$19.95) Neither the title nor the Publishers Weekly review mentions Officer Tippit. "Belin ably presents the official view.... He is hard on alternate theorists, accusing them of either ignoring witnesses or using them selectively...." "At least half the book" deals with the Rockefeller Commission investigation of the CIA; this part is "far more interesting," on such topics as "efforts by Kissinger to prevent much of this material from coming to light. In the end, Belin comes across as a sturdy and likable, if somewhat pompous fellow, often overmatched by devious officialdom but genuinely anxious to see justice prevail." (#86, PW, 16 Sep)

Ray Ritchie has finished his "Comprehensive Listing of JFK Documents In the [HSCA] Volumes." (107 pages, spiral-bound, \$17.50 including U.S. postage from the compiler at 5 Belmont Ave., Randolph, ME 04345.) This is an otherwise unavailable listing of documents cited in the HSCA volumes (but generally inaccessible), by number and by name of the person interviewed. It is a useful research tool if you share my interest in learning more than the HSCA spelled out about which areas they explored, who they talked to, and when. If you have the HSCA volumes, you should have this listing. (Or, encourage your library to purchase it.) (Ritchie is also compiling a bibliography, and would appreciate information about exotic publications - for more details, ask for #87.)

Gary Hart likes George Bernau's novel, "Promises to Keep." (9 EOC 3.5) In part because of his Church Committee work, Hart "think[s] President Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy." (Hart's review: 9 Oct, LAT, 2 pp., #88)

Paperback rights to David Scheim's book have been sold to Zebra. (Press release: 29 Jul, #89) And "Forthcoming Books" has listed "November 22, 1963: Where They Were," by John Jovich, for September (Woodbine House).

One more book by a buff is probable for November, but unannounced. It deals with an area of the case which has intrigued some researchers, but not me. At least one other unannounced book is a possibility.

Anniversary TV, radio, and press coverage:

Sen. Edward Kennedy has encouraged Americans not to remember JFK's death on November 22, but to celebrate his life on his birthday, May 29, as "many of his friends have begun" to do. "I hope that... people will understand my family's feelings about Jack and will join us in future years." (SFC, 1 Jul 88, #90)

Nonetheless, even in Boston, "JFK's death still hot TV fare." (19 Sep 88, Boston Herald, #91) There will be some new programs on JFK's life and times, and some repeats of old movies and documentaries. Geraldo will show five hours of the Spence-Bugliosi-LWT mock trial; I don't know if any new or previously unseen material will be included. The only network special noted is two hours with Dan Rather on "CBS Reports" on "the life and death of JFK." (I also expect some coverage on the CBS Evening News.)

The PBS science program "Nova" will air its hour on the JFK case on November 15, "using previously unavailable technical knowledge." Medical and acoustical evidence, among other things, may be covered.

Jack Anderson's two-hour special is scheduled to appear on November 2. "He says he'll break news linking organized crime to the assassination." (#91) According to Herb Caen, he has interviewed Melvin Belli "for a TV special titled 'The Secret Life of Jack Ruby.'" (29 Sep, SFC, #92) The people from the Anderson organization I have talked with do not share his focus on the Mafia angle to the exclusion of others, or his apparently casual acceptance of Johnny Roselli's account blaming Castro and former Mob hit men.

According to an October 25 report on CBS radio news, a program shown in

England alleged that the assassins were French hit-men hired by the Mafia, and that the late Lucien Sarti was the "policeman" who can be seen on the knoll in the Moorman photo. This must be the work of producer Nigel Turner of ITV (known here as Central Independent Television), who was in the U. S. last year talking to various buffs, including Steve Rivele. (I am skeptical enough about the French Connection not to put this news on page one; more later.)

Among the most promising efforts, in terms of new information, is the documentary being prepared by KRON, the NBC affiliate in S.F., for broadcast on November 19. Local columnists noted that co-anchor Sylvia Chase was not on the air much during the Olympics; it turned out that she "has been in Dallas trying to dig up fresh angles... but who can take more on JFK's assassination?" (Morse, SFX, 5 Oct 88, #93)

The producer is Stanhope Gould, who worked with Chase on the suppressed 1985 "20/20" segment on JFK and Marilyn Monroe. "The show will probably not reveal anything new but will piece together a number of documented revelations and accusations from myriad sources." Gould noted that people tend to remember the WC's conclusions, but not those of the HSCA. "Gould continued, 'And I don't think a majority of our viewers know that Kennedy's body left Dallas in one coffin and arrived in Bethesda (Maryland) in another one. The show will be filled with bits and pieces like that.'" (SFC, 8 Oct, #94)

On cable, the Arts & Entertainment Network will rebroadcast about four hours of NBC's original coverage, 25 years later to the minute, followed by some of the evening news from November 22, 1963. (31 Aug, Hollywood Reporter, and 3 Sep, SFC, #95)

Channel 4 in England also has a program in the works.

The Kwitny Report (WNYC-TV) has put together a program - partly documentary, partly interviews of experts. I gather the focus is on organized crime.

Ross Fraser of Public Interest Affiliates in Chicago has been putting together a two-hour overview for distribution to various radio stations. He has talked to many buffs and figures in the case.

I am not aware of much interest by the print media. There will probably be articles by Seth Kantor, and by Bob Katz in the Boston Globe. A two-part article by Ed Oxford will appear in the November and January issues of "American History Illustrated."

Mark Lane's "Rush to Judgment" film is available on video, along with "The Plot to Kill Robert Kennedy." (Ad: Nation, 26 Sep 88, #96)

Anniversary events:

Dr. Cyril Wecht, the dissenting member of the HSCA's Forensic Pathology Panel, is planning a program in Pittsburgh in November. As of mid-August, the program was not finalized. If interested, write him at Pittsburgh Institute of Legal Medicine, 1200 Centre Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15219 (412-281-9090).

Under the auspices of the Colloquium on the American Presidency, Ted Gandolfo will give an audio-visual presentation, "25 Years Later: What Have We Learned," at the Hofstra University Cultural Center (Hempstead, Long Island) on the afternoon of November 16. "Startling new revelations" are promised. (Flyer: #97, 2 pp.)

The opening of the exhibit in the TSBD has been postponed, to late December or January. The Dallas County Historical Society had (in mid-August) no plans for a ceremony on November 22, although that decision was subject to change if enough interest developed.

A pre-opening flyer on the exhibit is in general nicely done. (4 pp., #98) The notes on a Dealey Plaza walking tour include the HSCA's conclusion, with a 95% probability, that a gunman fired from the knoll (but does not refer to the subsequent rebuttals).

An unnamed "family friend" said the Kennedys "really are dismayed" by the prospect of an exhibit. "Charles Daly, a former aide to the president and head of the Kennedy Library..., said the library rejected a request by Dallas

officials to endorse the project. 'Being polite, I'd describe it as either morbid or disgusting or both,' Daly said...." (From a balanced article on preparations for the exhibit: Quincy, MA Patriot-Ledger, 31 May 88, 2 pp., #99)

Recent deaths:

Prof. Luis Alvarez of U.C. Berkeley died on September 1 at age 77, after a long illness. (Obituaries, 2-4 Sep: SFC, #100; SF Examiner, 2 pp., #101; Daily Cal, #102; LBL newspaper, 3 pp., #103; UPI in BG, #104. His autobiography was reviewed at 9 EOC 2.9.) The mainstream press does not seem to believe in "de mortuis nihil nisi bonum": He "didn't always suffer fools gladly, and in debates his normally amiable tongue could get the best of him." (#101) "Dr. Alvarez had a supreme confidence that bordered on arrogance.... But he was also fiercely loyal to friends.... 'Although Luie might have 100 ideas each day, 50 were probably useless, another 25 too difficult to do, and among the remaining 25 one or two would be worth a Nobel Prize,' remembered Robert T. Watt, a Stanford University physicist." (#100)

Several of these obituaries mentioned Luie's work on the JFK case, among his many other achievements. His "jiggle analysis" of the Zapruder film was typically clever, and would have made quite an impression if it had shown evidence of more than three shots. His analysis of the physics of target motion has never caught up with the incorrect "common sense" interpretation of the head snap as obvious and irrefutable evidence of a shot from the grassy knoll. The unfortunate thing about his strong feelings against the acoustical evidence is not that he pursued them - that is what scientists are supposed to do - but that the NAS Panel did not include an equally strong supporter of that evidence.

Working with Luie was challenging, but not easy or always pleasant for me. I was in the unusual position of actually knowing more than he did about some aspects of the Kennedy assassination - a relationship we never had in my role as a physics student in his group. Like many buffs, he was formidable when we disagreed but still a friendly colleague.

I particularly appreciated Luie's style at the regular Monday night physics seminars in his living room. I often sat in the back of the room during a particularly obscure presentation by a theorist, thinking, what's this all about - I don't get it. As a lowly grad student, I was not about to say anything. But I was always relieved when Luie piped up with, "I don't get it - what's this all about?"

Mae Brussell died on October 3 at age 66, after a period of failing health. (AP obituary in SFC: 5 Oct 88, #105) Her radio program, "World Watchers International," was on the air for 17 years, until this March, when she gave it up after receiving a death threat from a right-wing caller. She reportedly was planning a book. (21 Aug 88, SFX, #106)

"Brussell told The Chronicle in 1981, 'I began to realize that everyone around Lee Harvey Oswald was a Nazi or in the defense industry.' She also said that she had a copy of a 1967 FBI memo about her that said, 'She pictures America as controlled by conspirators in the government, which view she has stated publicly.'" (#105)

For someone who saw the world so full of enemies and conspiracies, she seems to have been a remarkably upbeat and pleasant person. I hear that she was a great source of support and encouragement to her many fans.

A number of people involved in the JFK case have died recently.

Additional obituaries for David Phillips (see 10 EOC 2.1): #107, WP, 9 Jul 88; #108, NYT, 11 Jul; #109, LAT, 14 Jul.

Albert Jenner, 81, was counsel to the Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee during the Nixon impeachment hearings, and senior counsel to the Warren Commission. (He and junior counsel Wesley Liebler were in charge of

investigating Oswald's background and the possibility of a domestic conspiracy.) (UPI obituary, 19 Sep 88, #110)

Former DPD Sergeant Patrick Dean, who was in charge of security in the basement and heard Jack Ruby's first statement, has died; he was 56. (DMN and DTH obituaries, 14-15 Aug: #111)

Gordon Shanklin, the SAC of the Dallas FBI office in 1963, has died at age 78. Known as "No Comment Shanklin," he "kept his opinions about the investigation and controversies to himself." The assassination investigation "cemented a good working relationship with Hoover." (13 Jul 88, DMN (#112) and DTH (#113); 14-16 Jul, NYT, WP, and AP obituaries, part of #114)

Helen Gandy, 91, was J. Edgar Hoover's very private secretary for 54 years. In 1972, she said she destroyed Hoover's personal correspondence after his death. (13-16 Jul, WP and NYT obituaries, #114)

Bush:

My brief mention of a new Bush story (10 EOC 2.1) drew encouragingly few inquiries from EOC readers. But the story has stayed alive more than I expected, particularly in the pages of "The Nation."

Joseph McBride's story is based on a routine-looking FBI memo prepared by V. H. Nasca (released in 1977 if not earlier) which states that, the day after the assassination, some FBI information about Cuban exile reaction was "orally furnished to Mr. George Bush of the [CIA] and Captain William Edwards of the [DIA]... by Mr. W. T. Forsyth" of the FBI.

That is rather flimsy support for the suggestion that George H. W. Bush was working for the CIA at the time. The 1963 Houston and D.C. phone books 1963 are said to show over a dozen listings for George Bush. McBride has written a biography of Frank Capra; maybe it was so easy to identify the Mr. Smith who went to Washington that he was overconfident about Mr. Bush.

An unnamed intelligence source said "I know he was involved in the Caribbean. I know he was involved in the suppression of things after the Kennedy assassination." Even some named sources on the JFK case are not fully credible. These comments sound a bit like Prouty or Marchetti.

After considerable press attention to the McBride article, the CIA abandoned its usual no-comment policy and said that one George William Bush had worked for them. Reporting this, The Nation asked G. W. Bush ("wherever you are, if you are") to contact them. McBride said he "stood by his story." (#115, Nation, 7/30-8/6/88; also #116, wire-service report)

McBride found G. W. Bush, with the help of an Alexandria city directory that showed a George W. Bush, "emp US govt" in 1964. (Does not such a listing suggest that his original conclusion that the memo referred to G. H. W. Bush was too hasty?) Bush said "he had never received interagency briefings because he was 'just a lowly researcher and analyst.'" We're not talking about a briefing; the FBI just "furnished" certain information "orally." According to McBride, "He said he 'knew neither one' of two people the memorandum mentions as also being briefed, William T. Forsyth of the FBI [sic; he was the source of the information, not a recipient] and Capt. William Edwards of the DIA. 'So it wasn't me,' he said." (#117, 2 pp., 13-20 Aug 88) There is no suggestion in the memo that Forsyth knew either man or that the DIA and CIA men would even know that the other existed.

McBride asked, "And where was Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush on November 23, 1963?" FBI documents answering this question were provided to The Nation right after the original article, but have not been mentioned there. Bush was living in Houston, telling the FBI about a loony right-wing Republican colleague who had made menacing statements about JFK. On November 22, "Mr. George H. W. Bush, 5525 Briar, Houston, Texas, telephonically advised that he wanted to relate some hear say [sic] that he had heard in recent weeks, date and source unknown. He advised that one James Parrott has been talking of killing the President when he comes to Houston." Parrott,

interviewed the same day, had an alibi witness, another Young Republican who was with him in Houston. He denied threatening JFK. Seven months later, his name came up in connection with another ex-YAF member in Houston who had made anti-RFK remarks and had said that the assassination of JFK had been good for the country. An acquaintance called Parrott mentally unbalanced. (#118, 12 pp., comprises the available FBI documents on this and some related allegations; no FD-302 interview report for Bush is included.)

Miguel Acoca reported on these documents in the S.F. Examiner. (25 Aug 88, #119) "Bush's press office at first said the vice president hadn't made the call [to the FBI] and challenged the authenticity of the FBI reports. Then, several days later, an aide said Bush 'does not recall' making the call." Parrott was connected with the John Birch Society and "was fighting Bush and other moderates for control of the state's Republican Party."

Quite a few people seem to credit McBride's original speculation, although I don't really see why. On the whole, the evidence that this was G. H. W. Bush seems to be mainly that the denials have not been up to McBride's standards. In this regard, it reminds me of Cutler's allegation that Gordon Novel is the umbrella man, which he has allegedly failed to rebut convincingly. (Sorry, Bob.) In a solid Nation article on Bush's known (but often neglected) career as CIA Director, David Corn parenthetically mentioned that "His agency ties may have begun years before." (#120, 8/27-9/3, 3 pp.) (Corn has written a good critique of the Christic 'Secret Team' theory, suggesting that it grew out of the legal necessity to sue someone other than the government. Nation, 2-9 Jul 88, #121, 4 pp.)

More to the point is an observation in an article on "Dealing with Noriega: Bush's Drug Problem - and Ours" (#122, 5 pp., Nation, 27 Aug - 3 Sep 88). Jefferson Morley notes that "Journalists love the smoking-gun memo because it relieves them of the burden of thinking historically." In the case of this Bush memo, I would add "or critically." A similar problem is that the HSCA is treated by some of the press as if it came up with just a single fact, the acoustical analysis; much of its other work was neglected, maybe even by the Justice Department. There is much information of greater value in both the released FBI documents and the HSCA material.

I may find all this particularly irritating because The Nation is so anti-buff on the JFK case, and because of the discouraging prospect that his alleged 1963 CIA link will become a focus of attention at the expense of more substantiated and serious questions about Bush. I am not arguing that McBride's conclusion must be wrong. For all I know G. H. W. was working for the CIA in 1963, or maybe it was his evil twin Skippy, or maybe he was working for the KGB. G. H. W. Bush has many things about his resume to explain, but this FBI memo is not one of them.

"Libra":

Don DeLillo's fact-based novel has received a lot of critical attention. The basic plot device resembles Robin Ramsay's scenario (6 EOC 1.9). An unsuccessful assassination attempt, set up by CIA types to get Cuba back on JFK's agenda, develops its own momentum and turns into the real thing. DeLillo fleshes it out plausibly enough, if you don't mind Oswald being vaguer and less innocent than a simple patsy. Life imitates art, if not vice versa - it has just been revealed that Reagan strategist Stu Spencer "joked darkly" in 1984 that "If he got a bullet in the toe, it would help the election." (22 Sep 88, SFC, #123; cf. 6 EOC 2.9)

"Libra" presents the events of 1963 from several points of view: Oswald (mostly built around real facts), the plotters, and a CIA secret historian, who grows weary of the accumulated evidence and speculation, including "twenty-five years of novels." There are very few factual clinkers, and some tricky elements seem to be handled very skillfully - for example, Clay Shaw appears just as a social friend of Ferrie. Oswald and the Russians are aware

of an ONI "false defector" program, but Oswald may or may not be part of it. DeMohrenschildt plausibly connects Oswald to a G. Walton Moore-like figure and other, more fictional, CIA types.

My impression is that DeLillo absorbed a lot of the good critical work and little of the bad. Have any EOC readers been in contact with him? His named sources, I believe, include only the WC and HSCA material. I would guess he also read the Hurt and Summers books.

Most of the reviews I have seen which treat "Libra" as fiction are very favorable. If you are interested in them, let me know; they may be listed in a later EOC. I read very little fiction; but this left a positive impression - much more than DeLillo's 1983 article (6 EOC 2.4, #1984.50). Buff readers might be distracted by wondering which facts are real. Newsweek's reviewer suggested that the invented characters are added "so plausibly that the blurred line between fiction and research drives one to library shelves for books on the assassination." (15 Aug, #124, 2 pp.)

Some of the more interesting responses are the negative ones. George Will called the book "literary vandalism and bad citizenship," driven by "puerile" intellectual loathing of America. (22 Sep, OT, #125) In response to a NYT review, a letter from David Belin focused on the coincidental timing elements surrounding Ruby's entry to the basement. DeLillo's response was that "imperfectly motivated as always, [Ruby] wants to let events decide his course of action." (NYTBR, 4 Sep & 2 Oct, #126) The role of "coincidence" is one of DeLillo's main themes, and his central metaphor for Oswald's ambiguity is the balance scale symbolizing a Libran (and - in real life - the FPCC).

Jonathan Yardley called the book "in the end, an act of exploitation." "The liberties he has taken with the dead range from the plausible to the unwittingly comical, but those he has taken with the living are beneath contempt," particularly introducing Marina Oswald into the fiction, and fabricating conversations between her and Lee. (31 Jul, WP, 2 pp., #127) But:

Marina Oswald believes there was a conspiracy:

Marina formerly "accepted my role as the wife of the assassin," but has finally come to reject it. She has now concluded that JFK's death resulted from a conspiracy, and that Ruby's killing of Lee was part of a coverup; she is not sure whether Lee shot JFK. She thinks "he was caught between two powers - the government and organized crime." (#128, Ladies' Home Journal, Nov 88, based on an interview with two LHJ editors, 5 pp. plus photo; reproducible only with the written consent of the copyright proprietor.)

Marina is "frightened about being so outspoken," and was frightened in 1963. She thinks the Warren Commission led her to give unfavorable testimony about Lee. She didn't like Hoover when she met him, and complains about subsequent surveillance of her private life.

There is no new evidence here which is going to change many other people's minds, especially since Marina "acknowledges that [her] protectiveness [towards Lee] may be at the root of her need to find a new explanation for the assassination." Marina thinks Oswald was a government agent at some point. "'I can see that he had certain traits of professional training, like being secretive....' Oswald's cruelty, and his occasional displays of agitated emotion, may have been due to the pressure of his double life." Marina suggests that George DeMohrenschildt may have been telling Lee what to do. Marina's willingness to take a pro-conspiracy position in public is the most important aspect of this intriguing article.

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