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W. Post

Sep 15 '75

Assassination Conspiracy Theories

A three-minute survey of the local newsstand turns up:

- A U.S. News and World Report article on Sen. Richard Schweiker's attempt to reopen the John F. Kennedy assassination investigation;

- A Time magazine story on the FBI and "The Oswald Cover-Up";

- A Ramparts piece on Dick Gregory prominently featuring the activist-comedian's suspicions of CIA and FBI involvement in the assassination and Lord-knows what else;

- A special issue of Skeptic magazine titled: "Who Killed JFK?"

(There was also a Oui magazine article attempting to tie John and Robert Kennedy to the "murder" of Marilyn Monroe, but that's another conspiracy.)

Twelve years after the slaying of a President, the official Warren Commission version of that tragedy is in as much doubt as it ever was. And not just among those researchers put down as "conspiratorialists," either. The doubters include responsible journalists, publishers, public officials and, of course, the public. A Gallup Poll survey taken in November 1963 revealed that only 29 per cent of the American people believed Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

If there is one major difference between the doubts then and the doubts now, it is that the early suspicions were of a too-hasty, too-tenderminded approach by the Warren Commission which allowed Oswald's co-conspirators to escape.

Maybe the commission members didn't want to believe the existence of a conspiracy; maybe they did believe, but also believed the American people would be better off not knowing what the commission members suspected.

Those were the doubts then. The doubts now are a good deal more sinister. Partly as a result of new information and partly as a result of new post-Watergate skepticism, the suspicions now are that there not only was a con-

spiracy but that the government agencies involved in the investigation were also part of the conspiracy.

Obviously no single column can explore the doubts and the information that produced them. But the suspicions centering around Oswald—even assuming he shot the President—are compelling enough by themselves to warrant a re-opening of the investigation.

Robert Sam Anson, writing in Skeptic, notes the allegations (including those forwarded to the Warren Commission by Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr) that Oswald was in the pay of the FBI and then takes a look at Oswald's Marine Corps record.

He was stationed for a time at Atsugi, Japan, "according to those familiar with the workings of the agency, one of the largest CIA bases in the world."

He received a hardship discharge from the Marine Corps in 1959, a scant three days after he requested it on the ground that his mother had been injured. ("A box dropped on her foot at work; she was back at work a few days later," Anson reported.)

Despite a bank balance of \$203, he somehow managed to pay in excess of \$1,500 for his passage to Russia, after spending but a few days with his mother.

Once in Russia, he went to the American Embassy and renounced his citizenship. Two years later, when he applied for a new passport, "it was routinely granted, along with a loan of several hundred dollars to get home," Anson wrote.

Sen. Schweiker told U.S. News that he found it strange that Oswald was so "favored in every step" and that the reason may have been his "affiliation with an intelligence operation."

It has recently come out that Oswald delivered a "threatening note" to the FBI's Dallas office a few days before the assassination but that the note was destroyed by the FBI. FBI Director Clarence Kelley confirmed the note

and its destruction but has not disclosed its contents.

There is, in short, enough fact and rumor to suggest that Oswald was an agent of the FBI, the CIA or both. And if that connection could be established, it would mandate a different line of inquiry than the Warren Commission took—even if there were conclusive evidence that Oswald fired the fatal shots.

Which there is not. In fact, a number of commission critics make a convincing case that Oswald could not possibly have fired all the shots that the evidence shows must have been fired that day.

It isn't necessary to link the presidential assassination to the Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations or to accuse present government officials as conspirators to conclude that there is a good deal that we haven't been told.

The best chance of learning more of what actually happened, and who was involved in it, may lie in the resolution sponsored by Sen. Schweiker. The Pennsylvania Republican, a member of the committee looking into the CIA, told U.S. News:

"Up until a few months ago, I was one who believed the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald had acted alone. But all these new developments have caused me to question some of the commission assumptions. I think there are certainly grounds for taking another look. To me, it's like a big, public boil that's going to burst."

Schweiker's resolution would direct the committee headed by Sen. Frank Church to investigate the possible roles of Oswald and Jack Ruby in the FBI and CIA and also to examine the way those agencies handled their investigation and reporting for the Warren Commission.

But if the conspiracy is as big and powerful as some commission critics believe, Schweiker hasn't a prayer of reopening anything.