FOREWORD

by Pierre Salinger

No SINGLE subject has caused such debate or created such controversy in the past three years as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Even before any official investigation had started most of the world (not then including the United States) accepted as fact that the President had been the victim of a conspiracy. Now, with the outpouring of books on the subject, the United States itself has been added to the list of countries where there are serious reservations on the facts surrounding the President's death.

It has been my belief and it still is my belief that the Warren Commission performed a difficult assignment honorably and well, and that it accurately pinpointed the assassin of John F. Kennedy.

It is the very thoroughness of the Warren Commission that has caused its problems. It listened patiently to everyone, no matter how credible or incredible the testimony. It then appended all this testimony to its report, providing an opportunity to anyone with a typewriter and a lot of time on his hands to write a book on the subject. The result has been shocking. The books about the Warren Commission divide into three categories: those written with a scholarly approach to whom we must attribute the best motive, those written by persons with a desire for notoriety or money, and those written by persons who clearly have to be labeled as psychotic.

Even those who have written in the name of scholarship have carefully either ignored or underlined testimony in the Warren Commission Report to buttress whatever theory they have de-

than a squad of hired killers. The country might be sick—and not just from grief—but at least it had not spawned a whole apparatus of plotters, Left Wing or Right Wing, audacious enough to murder a President.

Confidence in the findings of the Commission was bolstered two months later with the publication of its Hearings—the 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits on which it based its conclusions. In those 54 pounds of bluebound books there was ample evidence, not only of Oswald's guilt, but of the fact the Commission had not merely tried him *in absentia*. Functioning as a fact-finding body rather than a court of law (a distinction that worked to its advantage but which its critics refuse to acknowledge) it explored more theories, tracked down more leads, and listened to more rambling witnesses, expert and illiterate, than any body of its kind in history.

It interrogated strip teasers and senators, street urchins and psychiatrists. It listened patiently while Revilo P. Oliver of the John Birch Society expounded his theory of the assassination: President Kennedy was killed by fellow Communists because he was "turning American." It dealt gently with an attorney named Mark Lane, the only witness who insisted on testifying in public session, when he told the Commission of a purported meeting, eight days before the assassination, between Jack Ruby and Officer J. D. Tippit, then refused to reveal the source of his information. ("You have done nothing but handicap us," said the Chief Justice of the United States.) (V H 553) Carrying his own stopwatch, the Chief Justice jogged down the back stairs of the Texas School Book Depository to determine whether the assassin could get from his sniper's nest to that second-floor Coke machine, where Oswald was first seen by police after the shooting, in one minute and 14 seconds. (He could.)

With the submission of its 296,000-word report, the Commission was hailed both at home and overseas for what *The New York Times* called "a comprehensive and convincing account of the circumstances of President Kennedy's assassination." The *Times* added: "Readers of the full report will find no basis for questioning the Commission's conclusions that President Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone." *Life* magazine said: "The major significance of the report is that it lays to

rest the lurid rumors and wild speculations that had spread after the assassination. It also confirms the basic facts . . . that Lee Harvey Oswald did it, alone . . ." The London *Times* called it "thorough, painstaking, voluminous, frank, and, above all else, scrupulously careful in its analysis and conclusions." The *Manchester Guardian* expressed belief that "only the most skeptical will continue to harbor doubts about the assassination in the face of this massive report. The event remains a ghastly tragedy, but no longer a mystery."

That was in September, 1964. No non-fiction work ever received better reviews. It was a best seller.

But two years later the climate of American opinion had undergone a dramatic and disquieting change. By the fall of 1966, one reputable pollster found that nearly two thirds of all Americans doubted the Commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone. The doubt was attributed partly to a sense of frustration that Oswald was never brought to justice—a mixed sense of guilt and unease about Dallas. But it was attributed in larger measure to a new phenomenon in American literature—a growing five-foot shelf of anti-Warren books.

Beginning with Buchanan's *Who Killed Kennedy?*, printed in Britain even before the Warren Commission submitted its report, a dozen books had been published, each rejecting the Commission's findings and most posing different theories of the assassination. Suddenly a whole army of amateur sleuths had taken upon itself, some out of honest misgivings, others for fun and profit, the task of demolishing the Commission and its conclusions.

The new theories posed ranged in improbability from Buchanan's (a Texas oil millionaire decreed the deaths of Kennedy and Khrushchev to gain control of the world oil market) to Edward Jay Epstein's mild-sounding conclusion in his book *Inquest* ("there is a strong case that Oswald could not have acted alone"). In between were such works as *The Oswald Affair*, by Leo Sauvage, a Frenchman who believes Kennedy was killed by Southern racists, and *Whitewash*, by Harold Weisberg, a Maryland poultry farmer who apparently disbelieves everything in the Warren Report but the page numbers. Several authors held that Oswald was framed, a fall guy for reactionary interests (including variously FBI, CIA and Army types). One insisted that the

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