

THE DOUBTING AMERICAN THOMAS

"...Jesus came and stood among them...Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and My God!'" - John 20:26-28

The American people, by a three to two majority according to the results of a recent Louis Harris survey, "have deep and abiding doubts about the official explanation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy put forth in the Warren Commission Report."

They reject by that margin the main hypothesis of the Report that the killing was the work of a "lone assassin." They tend to believe, Mr. Harris says, that the killing was part of a larger plot, although they are at a loss to describe its composition.

If we can believe that the results of this survey have general application to the public at large, it means that three out of every five Americans are doubting Thomases when it comes to the Warren Report. They do not think they have been given substantial proof of its main proposition. "Shew me" they demand in a dubious chorus.

Almost as if to counter this growing trend of doubt, the U.S. News and World Report magazine recently (and then the Saturday Review) in an article definitively entitled "The Truth About the Kennedy Assassination" featured a very long and revealing interview with Arlen Specter, the assistant

counsel to the Warren Commission. "You get in precise detail what the evidence PROVES about that fateful day in Dallas," the subhead smugly declares. Indeed, you get much more if you read between the lines. You get an event -- little known until now [^] which can only breed massive doubt in the minds of the American public.

The seeming suspension of journalistic objectivity in this article indicates that officialdom is running ^{scared} ~~scared~~ in the light of the Harris survey, the many books critical of the Report and the furor being raised over the alleged censorship of the Manchester book which could yet be suppressed.

Speeter is certainly the last forensic word for the official side. Any doubts he raises in people's minds are bound to be serious ones. Some of his arguments appear fairly watertight, but others almost seem to insult the intelligence of people who are ^{only} laymen when it comes to law.

There is no space here to discuss all the major bones of contention between those who accept and those who reject the Report for whatever reasons. Some of the more contentious statements which Speeter reiterates on behalf of the Commission would provide circumstantial evidence in a court, but certainly not "overwhelming" as Speeter claims.

We must also leave alone [^] the many eyewitness depositions which strongly suggest the possibility of more than one assassin, but which either were not given ~~the~~ credence by the Commission or even the courtesy of a hearing. For instance, the body declined to listen to the testimony of a U.S. Senator from Texas, on whose behalf Kennedy went to Texas in the first place !

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On the contrary, the matter which understandably is currently arousing the greatest factual controversy (because physical evidence is still obtainable in this department) is not Oswald and his motives, movements, Marxism or marksmanship and not who any co-conspirators might have been, or who the Commission should have believed and who not. It is instead the crucial medical estimates, findings and autopsy reports concerning the exact nature and location of the President's wounds. On these, as on nothing else, the work of the Warren Report stands or falls. But the means by which the American public might doublecheck what the Report says about the wounds were impounded shortly after their creation by a current political idol of that same public:

The World Report article claims that the complete set of ~~the~~ x-rays and photographs of the wounds was NEVER MADE AVAILABLE to the commission or its staff, because Robert Kennedy took charge of them immediately after the autopsy and "refused to let anyone else see the x-rays and pictures." They are now said to be located in the National Archives, but under the direct control of the Kennedy family, and presumably accessible to no one else.

Although the Commission did not see the x-rays and photos, the doctors who wrote the autopsy report presumably did (although this is also unclear if Kennedy refused to let "anyone" else see them) and the Commission in turn took the doctors' word for it. As Specter states it so cavalierly and infuriatingly: "THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND X-RAYS WOULD, IN THE THINKING OF THE COMMISSION, ^{BE} WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN CURTAINED BECAUSE THEY WOULD HAVE SERVED ONLY TO CORROBORATE WHAT THE AUTOPSY SURGEONS HAD TESTIFIED TO UNDER OATH."

If this curious line of thinking held sway, it was truly an amazing inversion of the priorities of courtroom rules of evidence, with perjury-proof physical exhibits being held subordinate to sworn testimony. Wouldn't killers love to be tried under these rules of evidence ???

How can Speeter claim as a FACT that these photos "would corroborate that which the autopsy surgeons testified to "when neither he nor the Warren Commission has ever seen them ?? When such physical evidence is available, why settle for anything less ? We hope Speeter does not operate this way as Philadelphia's District Attorney!

Speeter is of course ready to defend to the hilt the asserted non-exculpatory nature of the photographs. In a line of reasoning which gets "curiouser" he says any hinted cover-up or collusion their absence may indicate would have required too many officials to lie -- "That's not only monstrous -- it's impossible" he concludes.

"Monstrous ?" What could be more "monstrous" than a high-level cover-up of the truth ? And surely it is not so "impossible" as Speeter wants people to think. Might we humbly suggest that to suppress this most vital *sine qua non* exhibit, this fountainhead of credibility for anything that comes after it, to suppress this in the early stages of the investigation, indeed even before the investigation ~~even~~ ^{ever} began, could easily ^{have} thwarted all subsequent honest efforts to "ascertain the truth" and implicate not by collusion but by ignorance and trust in others the Commission, its lawyers and staff, etc.

LET'S FACE IT. THERE WAS NO GOOD LEGAL OR MORAL OR EVEN AESTHETIC ARGUMENT FOR THIS AMAZING ACT OF SEQUESTRATION. ANY EVIDENCE PERTAINING TO

THE PUBLIC DEATH OF A PRESIDENT BELONGS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE -- NOT TO THE FAMILY OF THE DECEASED.

Speeter complains that the Report critics have relied almost exclusively on the evidence supplied by the Commission itself and have not come up with a "scintilla of evidence." Mark Lane's efforts disprove this challenge conclusively and how can the critics do anything when the most important "scintilla" reposes in the National Archives ?

As Harold Weisberg so bluntly and acidly puts the case for the necessity of having the photographs in his "Whitewash": "Is it conceivable that what is routine in the field of forensic pathology was too good for the President of the United States or for the Commission that was to have and give the final word on his assassination ?"

Even Speeter himself admits that showing the photos would be "helpful" in allaying the growing doubts of these three-fifths Doubting American Thomases, although he himself uses the term as a derogatory one for the Commission's published critics, who deserve gratitude instead.

And what of the original "doubting Thomas," Thomas the Twin, one of the twelve disciples ? The "doubting Thomas" allusion is indeed an apt one because of the object doubted, the wounds of Christ in the first case, and of Kennedy in this one. St. John tells us that Thomas insisted on the "seeing is believing" axiom when Resurrection reports were told him by the other disciples, but that when Christ appeared to him and let him feel the nail wounds, he was convinced and reportedly cried out in affirmation: "My Lord and My God!"

Thus even Christ Himself, who was dearly wanted to be taken on faith alone, like the Commission seems to want to be accepted, was not above letting Thomas put his fingers in the wounds since he could not believe ANY OTHER WAY. And inasmuch as the wound photographs could remove any doubts about the veracity of the Warren Report, they should be revealed also, for there are many healthily skeptical Americans who just will not believe any other way. Can Robert Kennedy, or Warren, or the Commission or whoever is responsible for the continuing absence of the wound photos, do any less in all good conscience ??

We call on them to roll away the stone they have used to entomb these documents in the Archives and let American truth and credibility be resurrected after three symbolic years.

If possible, clear up any doubt in the minds of the doubting American Thomases in the spirit of the first Thomas they may say: "My Government and My Country...Now I believe!"

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