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## *Skeptics gather to examine the mystery of JFK's death*

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PITTSBURGH — A blurry home movie filmed by a man named Abraham Zapruder is their Holy Bible. They watch it over and over again, with blow-ups and freeze frames, counting the gun shots, calculating the bullet trajectories.

Their demons are many. They include the Warren Commission report, its "single bullet" and "lone assassin" theories and a cast of characters ranging from U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) to Lyndon B. Johnson.

They speculate about plots within plots, government cover-ups, doc-

tored photographs, forged identities and a missing brain.

And now, a quarter of a century later, a former Haverford College professor told assassination buffs at a University of Pittsburgh conference during the weekend that they still are no closer to piecing together the facts behind John F. Kennedy's murder on Nov. 22, 1963.

One-time certainties have dissolved, and "the evidence itself has become more confused and confusing," said Josiah Thompson, who wrote *Six Seconds in Dallas*.

"Don't you see now how surreal this is?" he said. "Here we are 25

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# They pursue facts of JFK's death

KENNEDY, from 1-A

years later; we're trying to find out who killed John Kennedy [and] we're talking about melons, skulls, muscles."

In fact, said Thompson, a philosopher turned private investigator, "The contradictions in the evidence are so many and so profound that any attempt to offer a single, convincing account of what happened must fail."

Nevertheless, the search for certainty continued at the three-day conference, which was sponsored by two student groups and attended by about 600 people, many of them deeply steeped in assassination lore.

Entitled "The Kennedy Assassination: A Critical Review," the conference featured only critics of the Warren Commission report, reprised the various arguments for conspiracy and included calls for yet another investigation of the case.

Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, a conference organizer and forensic pathologist from Pittsburgh, said that the idea of inviting Warren Commission defenders — whom he characterized as "self-appointed camp followers and sycophants" — was discarded.

"We all agreed that we didn't need that kind of rancor and drama," Wecht said in an interview. "They've had their opportunity, with the full might and power ... of the federal government."

Instead, the conference drew its drama from the presentation of previously unreleased photographic evidence by Robert Groden of Boothwyn, Delaware County, who served as a photographic consultant to the U.S. House Select Committee on As-

sassinations.

The most startling photograph, which elicited gasps from the audience, showed the dim outline of a figure in a window on the western side of the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository — the opposite side of the one-room floor from which Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly shot Kennedy.

Taken 15 seconds after the assassination, the photograph, according to Groden, suggested that a second person was present as a possible accomplice in the shooting. Groden said he made the image by lightening a familiar black-and-white negative taken by a news photographer at the scene.

A separate, color slide, shot by an Army Intelligence officer about 30 seconds after the assassination, showed a diagonal shape, possibly part of a body, in the Oswald window — at a time when witnesses placed Oswald four floors below, Groden said.

Groden also presented 8mm-film fragments that he said depicted three moving figures on the floor just minutes before the shooting, when he said they might have been setting up the sniper's nest.

Finally, he showed freeze frames from the Zapruder films that provided what he said was the clearest look yet at the fatal shot, or shots, to the president's head.

Groden, who has spent \$45,000 of his own money researching the assassination, said he believed that as many as eight shots, five more than the Warren Commission indicated, were fired at Kennedy by a minimum of three gunmen — none of

whom was Oswald.

But other theories abounded.

John H. Davis, author of *Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, and David E. Scheim, author of *Contract on America: The Mafia Murder of President John F. Kennedy*, discussed their theories of mob involvement in the assassination.

A British documentary, titled *Executive Action* and given its American premiere at the conference, was even more specific. It fingered three gangsters from Marseilles, France, as hitmen hired by the U.S. Mafia to perform the assassination.

The conference's closing speaker, Bernard Fensterwald Jr., president of the Assassination Archives and Research Center, reminded his audience of the uncertainties that remained, as well as the long history of attempts by various government agencies to obstruct the fact-gathering process.

"There's a possibility, even a probability, that we're talking about two separate conspiracies — one to murder the president, the other to cover up the murder," said Fensterwald, who said that the two conspiracies might have involved different people with different motives.

But, he said, "I think it's just a question of time before the case cracks open."

Other conference participants said that they, too, were not ready to give up on the mystery. "Hopefully, I'll live long enough that I'll be around when the truth comes out," said Ed Isaac, 30, an assistant manager for a Pittsburgh chemicals business.