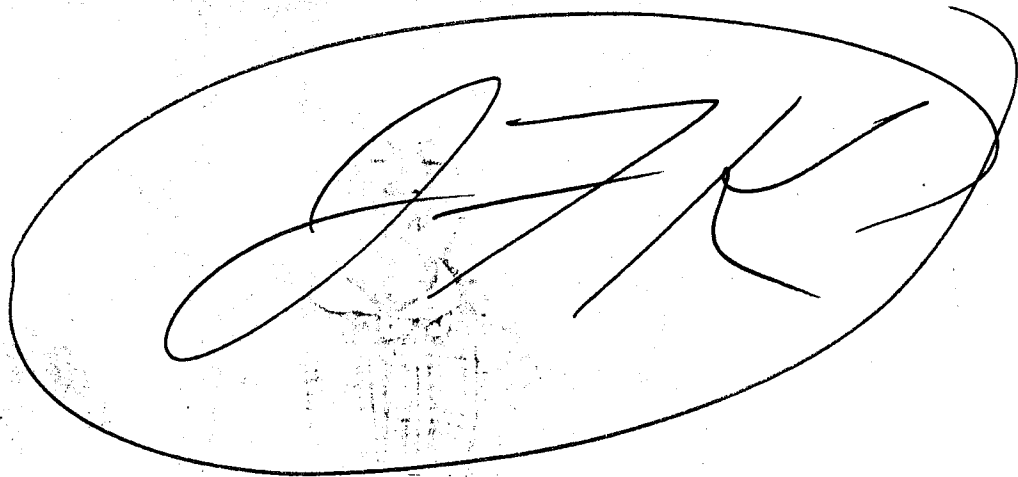


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THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION: WHY DOUBTS PERSIST

A British investigator finds disturbing questions unanswered

ANTHONY SUMMERS

British TV producer Anthony Summers' report is adapted from the BBC weekly "The Listener" of London.

A bar in an Oxford alleyway, a long time ago in my life. Early evening Muzak, usual orders lined up on the counter for familiar first-comers. On Nov. 22, 1963, I was a student working at odd jobs to pay bills, trying meanwhile to break into television. The break nearly came at seven o'clock that night when the telephone rang behind the bar. The editor of Granada's *World in Action* was talking fast, on two lines at once, rustling up reporters and researchers for a charter flight to Dallas, Tex. He asked me to leave for Heathrow Airport by taxi, in half an hour. It seemed a stupendous journalistic chance—until they rang back to say they had found someone with more experience. As the world's journalists raced to Dallas, I went on pulling pints.

The killing of John Kennedy is a cliché, pigeonholed in the memories of millions. It is a cliché, too, to say that the moment the bullets struck home in Dealey Plaza took the breath away from an era as well as a President. But it is true, and it directly altered the experience of any journalist who was to spend the next dozen years covering foreign affairs and the United States. Perhaps that is exactly what it was intended to do, for after the "lone nut," Oswald, was in his turn murdered, as rumor piled on disturbing scraps of evidence with every passing year, it seemed increasingly plausible that the crime was the result of a monstrous conspiracy by nameless men of power. Or was that paranoia, born of inevitable legend?

The Kennedy assassination has been for me a story of endless fascination, but one to keep away from. It has appeared what indeed it can be: a mire of half-truths waiting to swallow up journalistic reputa-

tions. I was surprised, last summer, when I let myself be persuaded into doing some initial research for a TV report. It was Washington in May, stale with that political dirt which seems to cling and cling, not least because, for so many Americans, the residue of the last years still seems more relevant than the call of Carter.

First, I had to deal with the mountains of books—in the United States one may now pick his version of the truth from 250 volumes. Then there were the people to be sifted, the hundreds of American citizens, of all political persuasions and all ages, who squirrel tirelessly toward their Holy Grail: *Who Killed Kennedy, and Why?* And always there was an awareness that this is not yesterday's story after all, that fresh revelations continue.

We eventually started filming the day after Christmas. The restraints of the medium had, as always, forced this octopus of a story into a harness called a shooting schedule. Our celluloid perception of myriad Kennedy clues was to be captured, for better or for worse, in four weeks of running film through the camera. Quite coincidentally, we began where it had ended for John Kennedy, in downtown Dallas.

Below the grimy façade of the Texas School Book Depository, where Oswald allegedly once fired three shots in five seconds, we watched as a motley crowd of tourists came to gawk and listen to preposterous theories from instant experts. We moved among them with the aging man who had been Dallas police chief in 1963, Jesse Curry, stumbling a little now as he led us up the famous grassy knoll. Curry still smarts from the cuts of the press who blamed his police force for being inefficient on the day of the assassination, and then later for allowing Oswald to be felled by Jack Ruby inside his police station. Retired now, he had decided to speak out more than he ever had before. "I was traveling in the lead car, right in

front of the President, and I immediately suspected that the first shot had come from in front—not from behind, where Oswald was. I cannot say that I believe there was one man, and one alone, doing the shooting."

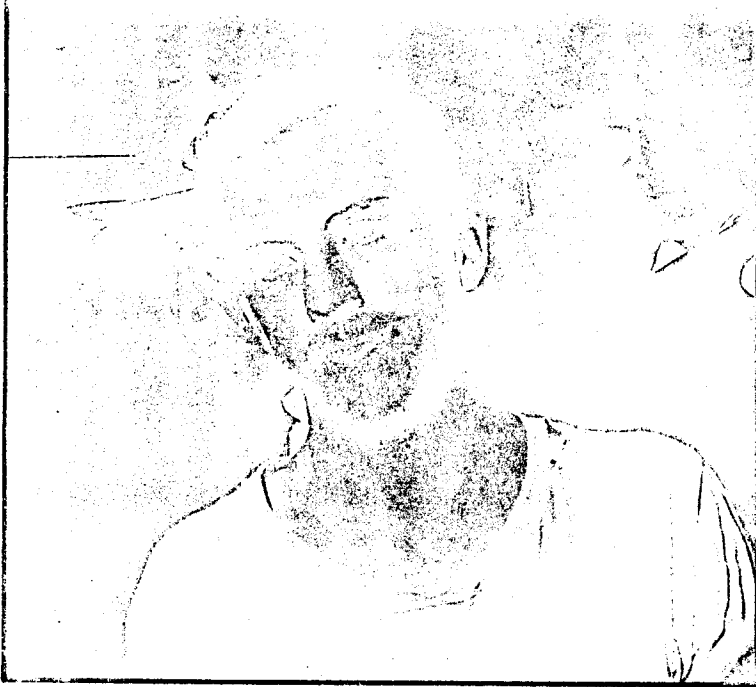
And Curry insisted on questioning one anomaly the Warren Commission chose—as it so often did when things failed to fit—to ignore. Who was the man, in perfect shooting position behind the picket fence, who produced a Secret Service identity card when challenged by one of Curry's officers moments after the assassination? Officially there were no Secret Service agents anywhere near that particular spot on Nov. 22.

Working on the assassination story, and especially in Dallas itself, it is folly to get bogged down in the minutiae of evidence—who fired from where, how many bullets, "planted" fingerprints, "fake" photographs. Pick your expert, and you will get an answer to fit any thesis. But, especially to the foreigner, there are some facts which can still shock, and have not as yet been adequately explained.

Why, for instance, did the FBI in Dallas destroy a crucial piece of evidence within days of the assassination? Not long ago, an agent confessed that he had torn up a note delivered to the FBI office by Lee Harvey Oswald before the assassination, and then flushed it down the toilet. He did so, he says, on orders from his superior, who in turn, it seems, had received orders from Washington.

In Fort Worth, the former Attorney General of Texas, Waggoner Carr, interviewed between court cases, drily agreed that the destruction of evidence was scandalous: "It has destroyed my feeling of confidence in what the FBI was doing. They were hiding things, not coming fully forward." Carr, also a close friend of Lyndon Johnson, who succeeded John Kennedy and publicly accepted the findings of the Warren Commission, confirmed that





Oswald—"a product of, or interacting with, the intelligence agencies."

Johnson in later years had grave doubts. Johnson said, "In time, when all the activities of the CIA are flushed out, then maybe the whole story of the Kennedy assassination will be known."

As we worked on, as witness succeeded witness in front of the camera, we at least began to know what our story was. Whoever killed Kennedy, the once-respected intelligence agencies of the United States had made frantic, deliberate efforts to obscure the evidence and hide vital witnesses. In Mississippi, a veteran CIA agent sat on the pier and talked about coincidences. The one in question was that a few weeks before the assassination his name, William Gaudet, appeared on a list of visa applications for Mexico immediately next to a better-known name—that of Lee Harvey Oswald.

Until very recently Gaudet's name remained unknown, because the FBI had falsely stated in a report that there was "no record" of the person next to Oswald on the visa list. Now that his name, and his CIA affiliation, have emerged (ironically as a result of a bureaucratic blunder by the FBI) Gaudet can only stonewall unconvincingly: "It's a coincidence, and I'm going to stick to that story."

But the coincidences abound with Gaudet. He admitted he had met Oswald, could describe him in detail, and had seen him in the company of another CIA agent. Gaudet was angry that his cover had been blown, hoped we would sympathize with him, and blurted out, "I think Oswald was a patsy. I think he was

set up on purpose. . . . I wouldn't put it past the CIA to use him."

We asked Gaudet whether, if the agency had used Oswald for intelligence purposes, they would have admitted it. "No," he answered. Not even to the Warren Commission investigating the murder of the President? "Not even to the Warren Commission," said Gaudet.

The year began for us in New Orleans, where Oswald passed a mysterious couple

"The destruction of evidence was scandalous. . . ."

of months shortly before the assassination. There, in the tangled streets of the Vieux Carré, the "lone nut" bumped up against a villainous cast of FBI informers, agents and counteragents, anti-Castro exiles doubling as CIA operatives, and Mafia hit men. It was here, more than anywhere else, that we encountered fear. Another favorite cliché when conversing about the Kennedy case is to mention the number of assassination witnesses and researchers who have died violently over the years. But even if the actuaries do say the death rate is frighteningly high, the journalist must largely discount it—reminding himself that time does pass and men do die.

It is harder to sustain that attitude when one comes in contact with inter-

viewees living, for more than fourteen years, in daily fear of their lives. The respectable doctor, badgered by the FBI into changing his evidence, afraid now to talk except anonymously, and agreeing only to be recorded on sound tape. The solid citizen who met Oswald in New Orleans, and is afraid to say publicly what he witnessed. His testimony seemed so important evidentially that we filmed him covertly, and secretly recorded his statement for the record. Three months before the assassination, he had seen Oswald receiving envelopes delivered by an agent in an FBI car.

Others were braver, although their forthrightness, more often than not, came only after persuasion. On the Kennedy story more than any other, I asked time and again whether the end could really ever justify the interviews in the can.

Perhaps, if one believes the man who claimed he saw Oswald repeatedly with known FBI officers but could not tell the Warren Commission the full story because, "Ten days before I was due to give testimony, I was threatened by an FBI agent" (the witness named the agent); "... he told me he would get rid of my ass, he would kill me."

Perhaps, if one believes the Teamsters' Union man whose story we traveled across the country to hear. He had told us about threats made against the life of both Kennedys, threats he had reported to the Justice Department before their deaths. What that witness had to say was confirmed by a distinguished judge who had listened in on his telephone calls, so we chose to believe him when, failing to show up for his interview, he wrote, "I'm sorry, I can't keep the appointment with you, but for the safety of my family and myself—I just don't think it would be fair to them. I pray that some day the press over here will be turned loose like you people. . . . I am sorry, but I have seen some of the injustices handed down, and I want my children not to have to live with it. Until now they have only known fear, death, and the threat of death."

In Miami, there was another former CIA agent, Antonio Veciana. Once found—and accomplishing that was difficult—he talked readily enough. Veciana had suitable credentials: he is a Cuban exile who admits to having twice tried to kill Castro on behalf of the CIA—once when Castro visited Allende's Chile, using a gun concealed inside a TV camera. If true, Veciana's story alone is sufficient to blow the Kennedy case wide open.

continued

He claims to have seen Oswald, a few weeks before the assassination, in Dallas, with an American intelligence officer who was working for either the CIA or Naval Intelligence and running Alpha 66—the most violent and unpredictable of all the anti-Castro exile groups. Just after the assassination, Veciana told us, the same officer asked him to help fabricate a story that Oswald had visited the Cuban consulate in Mexico City—to smear the Communists and divert attention from Oswald's real movements.

Oswald's real movements? For the investigator, he moves like a dual and sometimes multiple shadow across the face of the early Sixties. He was Marine and amateur Marxist, defector to Russia, and then pro- and anti-Castro activist in one.

Sen. Richard S. Schweiker, who in 1975 chaired the Senate committee investigating the role of the CIA and the FBI in connection with the assassination, told us, "All the fingerprints I found during my eighteen months on the select committee point to Oswald being a product of, or interacting with, the intelligence agencies....my view is that there was a

relationship between the Cuban connection and the assassination, and my view is that more than one person was involved."

I think I shall remember best a witness called Sylvia Odio, who told the Warren Commission that, one night before the Kennedy assassination, Oswald had been at her house in the company of two exile anti-Castro guerrillas. That evening he seemed shy and nervous and stood silently apart while the others talked revolution. Next day, one of the Cubans telephoned to talk about "the American." He seemed insistent on hammering home the point that Oswald was "an expert marksman, would be a tremendous asset to anyone....we Cubans should have shot Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs...we should do something like that."

I do not pretend to know that anti-Castro Cubans killed the President, or that the Mafia—in league with elements of the CIA—had Ruby silence Oswald. I do know, however, the reaction of the Warren Commission chief counsel, when senior staff drew his attention to the testimony of Sylvia Odio, whom they regarded as a highly, credible witness.

"We are supposed to be closing doors," he said testily, "not opening them."

As for Sylvia Odio, she agreed to give us her first-ever interview, and for no remuneration, even though an American network had once offered her \$20,000. She told her story and, in the ungracious way of TV journalists, we dropped it from the film because it was complicated and we lacked space. But her reply when I asked her why she had at last agreed to speak publicly was uncomplicated, and apt: "I guess I have a feeling of frustration after so many years. I feel outraged that we have not discovered the truth when I think that the American public needs to know the truth for history's sake, for all of us. I think it's because I'm angry...because of the forces I can't understand, and because there is nothing I can do against them. That is why I am here."

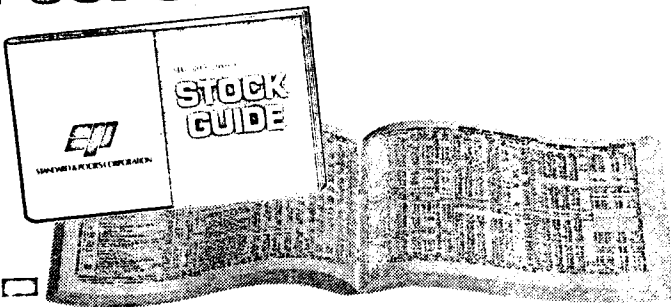
In Washington this year, the Congressional Assassinations Committee works on *in camera*. The press finds it amusing, others doubt the honesty of its intentions. That's politics. President Kennedy is dead.

Mar. 9

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